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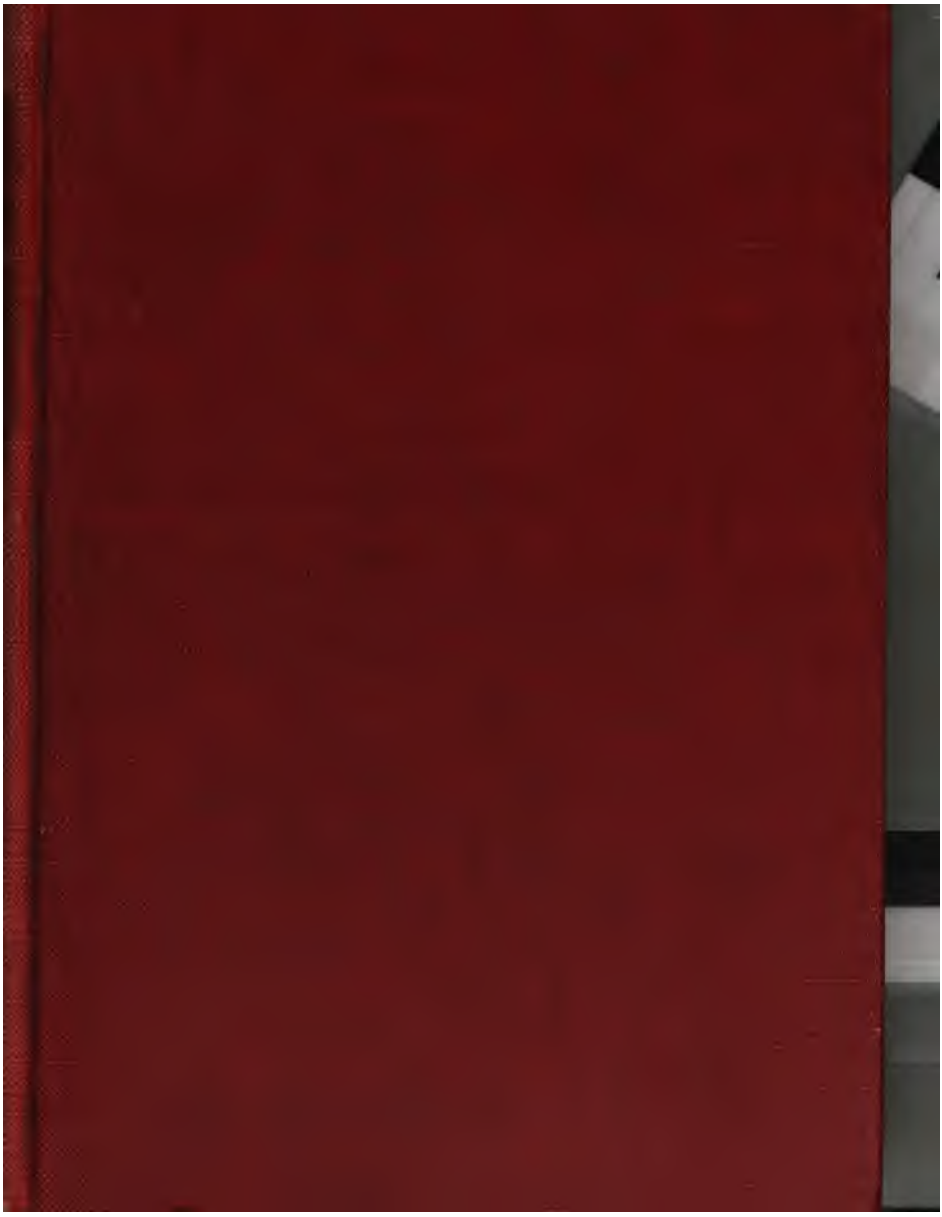

From the Ewald Flügel Library

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY

she loved," — persisted Maria. — "I hav
striking an example of it, lately, in my o
A sister of mine, the least studious among
married a book-worm, is now never happ
library; while my sister Bessy, so devoted t
that she never quits Denny Cross, will pr
when she loses him, as the wife of some N
shire squire, and forget that she was e
book."

"But how came it that Mr. Farmer
the bookish sister?" — inquired Jem
terested by her frankness.

"He never saw her till he had fal
Sophy, who was on a visit to us in t
perhaps, — for Bessy would not hav
so much older than herself."

"I was not aware, my dear Lady
terposed Lady Dinton, who had joine
you had a sister still unmarried, or
vited her to meet you here."

Maria replied gratefully; but as
invitation, however tempting, would
Denny Cross, even for a day. "Besom
constant companion and attendant."

"Then we must have endeavo
Pennington to bear her compan

"My father has never left

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as in unison with the falling

mournful in the one old
but the the last

entitled: — the poor, looking in vain for even the crumbs that ought to fall from a rich man's table. — Every soul in the parish was aware that Sir John Woolston Wraysbury of Harrals was one of the most opulent men in the three kingdoms. Yet he did even less for them than had been done by his penurious father; except that such farms as had fallen into his hands, were progressively placed in order, with a view to more advantageous letting.

Instead of making his appearance, as the villagers expected, in "a coach and six," according to traditions of old Sir Bernard, his grandfather, — or even in a coach and four, as the elders of the place remembered to have seen Sir Harry and my lady, — Sir John came stealing upon them once or twice a-year, in a fly; — to confer with the steward about the minimum of repairs necessary to secure the safety of that portion of the house where the family pictures and a few old cabinets were deposited, under his keeping; the rest of the time-worn mansion being allowed to stand or tumble, as it listed.

For Sir John, though his son and heir was nearly two years old, still delayed laying the foundation stone of the projected residence, the erection of which was to encroach further on an income so narrowed by the overgrown proportions of Lynchcombe. — The interest of the large sum bequeathed by Lady Woolston being absorbed by the restoration of his di-

lapidated farms, he had resolved, with the doggedness which was one of his characteristics, that not a stone of the new house should be laid, till the aggregate of three years of the Harrals' rent roll secured the means of its completion. — He would not fall into the same error there, as at Lynchcombe. He would create only such an abode for the future Sir Harry as might be creditably kept up on an income of eight thousand a-year.

But though prudence predominated over his designs and estimates, and warned him still to defer that first clash of brick and trowel, as awful to an experienced ear as the first fire from the trenches of a besieged fortress, the demoralized aspect of the old place produced as much emotion in his heart, as it is easy to create in that of a great capitalist, otherwise than by the fall of the twentieth part of a fraction in the public funds.

It was the period of the year most favourable to the beauties of the spot. — The beechwoods, tinged with amber by the early frosts, formed an appropriate background to the old pile; and the Virginian clematis, which crimsoned the venerable walls, reduced their complexion, by comparison, to a milder hue. The fading year, in short, was in unison with the falling house.

There was something mournful too in the one old hound that went limping about the premises; the last

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VOL. CCCXVI.

MAMMON BY MRS. GORE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

MAMMON;

OR,

THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

BY

MRS. GORE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1855.

Glories, like glowworms, far away, shine bright;
But look'd to near, have neither heat nor light.

WEBSTER.

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VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

MAMMON;

OR,

THE HARDSHIPS OF AN HEIRESS.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

It was a sultry evening in July; and the red dining-room at Harrals, into which the setting sun was pouring its full effulgence, glowed like a furnace. Curtains of crimson damask combined with a vivid Turkey carpet, nay, — even the dishes of acrid currants and cherries heaped on the old-fashioned mahogany table, and the crusty port constituting the favourite beverage of the crabbed master of the house, — served to aggravate the heat of a dispute then and there in progress between Sir Harry Woolston and his son. Legions of flies buzzing in the hermetically-closed windows, enlivened by the louder drone of an occasional wasp, afforded a running accompaniment to their angry dialogue.

The subject of their quarrel was one of no uncommon occurrence between a rich old father and his

son and heir; — namely, an imprudent marriage contemplated by the latter. But, as John Woolston had attained the sober age of thirty-one, and was, in other respects, a sedate and well-conditioned man, it may be inferred that the sole thing wanting in the engagement so unacceptable to his father, was the worldly pelf with which the Woolston family were themselves amply provided. The rent-roll of the Harrals estate amounted to eight thousand per annum; and the poor quiet little Lady Woolston, who had crept away from the dessert table, on perceiving that a stormy debate was about to set in between her husband and son, sprang from a wealthy Liverpool family, of commercial origin, from whom she derived a considerable fortune.

Sir Harry, however, remained as keenly alive to the value of a guinea, as though it were a coin he had rarely the luck to finger. Having charged his estate, at his marriage, with a sum of five-and-twenty thousand pounds, to be ultimately divided among his younger children, he made it the business of his life to economise, out of his income, the means of paying off this unwelcome incumbrance; till, by degrees, penurious habits became second nature. And now, though the sum in request had not only been fully completed, but distributed in the form of dowry to his three married daughters, he remained as careful, or rather as shabby, as if his family and his engagements were *still unprovided for.*

John Woolston, though an only son, and heir-in-tail to so handsome a property, had been educated at Rugby rather than Eton, and at a minor college at Cambridge numbering Woolstons aforegone among its benefactors, solely with a view to tame down his aspirings, and check his habits of expense. Sir Harry had even compelled him to study for the bar, on pretence that the recordership of his county town, or the chairmanship of the quarter sessions, would in a few years await his acceptance. But the real object of the wary old man was to establish his son out of harm's way, in quiet chambers in the Temple, rather than expose him to the pleasures and perils of a bachelor residence in May Fair.

The result was, that, instead of becoming Jack Woolston and a spendthrift, he remained plain John, and what his fashionable brother-in-law, Gerard Molyneux, termed a snob.

But Sir Harry found no cause to triumph in the results of his policy. For though his son had submitted to his authority so far as to eat his way to the bar, the bar afforded him nothing to eat in return; and in the event of his accomplishing the match, the announcement of which had so moved the ire of the old baronet, Mr. Woolston possessed nothing towards the maintenance of a family, save the allowance of five hundred per annum, formally assigned to him on leaving college.

This material point was again and again urged upon him by Sir Harry. But John replied, and at first with tolerable composure, "that, having complied through life with the wishes and counsels of his parents, he must on the present occasion be permitted to consult his own inclinations. Since Sir Harry denied him all further pecuniary assistance, he would rely on his professional exertions, and be content."

"Ay, — till you come into your estate," interrupted Sir Harry. "I know what you mean, Sir: — till your father is shuffled under ground, and you are privileged to stand in his shoes! No doubt these Denny Cross people have taken the exact measure of your rights and titles; — perhaps employed an actuary, to calculate my chances of life!"

"You do them great wrong, Sir. Mr. Pennington respects himself, and I trust respects *me* too much to indulge in any such paltry speculations," replied young Woolston. "For three years past, I have been engaged to his daughter; yet he has never urged my fulfilment of the contract, knowing it to be contrary to your wishes."

"Mighty honourable, — mighty magnanimous! But if so scrupulous, why not forbid you his house? — Why not end the matter at once?"

"Because he knows his daughter to be sincerely attached to me; and judges it unnecessary to oppose our mutual happiness, since we are prepared to be

poor, and frugal, till *you*, my dear father, can be brought to contemplate the case in a more reasonable point of view."

"Thank you, Sir; thanks, both to you and Mr. Pennington, and the whole legion of his clod-hopping family! If *you* are content, John Woolston, so am I. — But of this be sure: — that I am neither to be schooled nor canted out of my opinion. When you first asked my sanction to your addresses to this precious Maria of yours, — though even then, you had obtained both hers and her father's consent, — I told you plainly that *never* should such a daughter-in-law cross my threshold. No — never, never, *never!*"

"And I answered, that, as the Penningtons were people of the highest respectability in the county, and as the amiable disposition of my intended wife was a sufficient dowry for a man so unambitious as myself, I saw no grounds, Sir, for breaking off the connexion."

"Unambitious!" retorted his father; "you may truly say unambitious! To content yourself with the low circle of a petty squire, like Richard Pennington; little above the condition of a yeoman!"

"I beg your pardon, Sir. The Penningtons of Denny Cross have held their own in Northamptonshire quite as long as the Woolstons of Harrals. Unsecured by an entail, *their* estates have been morselled out; while ours remain intact. But this does not entitle

us to look down upon an independent man who has brought up a large family most creditably on a property of fifteen hundred a-year; whose sons are rising in the world; and whose daughters —"

What Sir Harry Woolston permitted himself to say of the daughters, it is unnecessary to repeat. Suffice it that his disparagement put the finishing aggravation to the wrath of his son; who now firmly announced his intention to make the vilified Maria his wife, without further delay. A small legacy lately bequeathed him by one of his mother's relations, would enable him to form an establishment suitable to their moderate pretensions. And again, he steadily repeated that his allowance would suffice their utmost wishes; and that Roger Farmer, the eminent Queen's counsel, of whom he had been a favourite pupil, had promised to push him forward in his profession.

Sir Harry, though his face was almost livid from the constraint he was exercising over one of the worst of tempers, determined to make a last effort to bring better convictions to the mind of his son. Till now, John Woolston had maintained in his family and neighbourhood the character of "an old head on young shoulders." His prudence, though dormant, might perhaps still be roused.

"To place the whole matter fairly before you, John," said the old man, lowering his voice to an almost confidential tone, "the fact is, that I have much

to reproach myself with, concerning the state in which the Harrals property will fall into your hands. For years after my death, it will be impossible for you to reside here; unless an advantageous marriage should have supplied you, in the interim, with the means of putting the place into condition. The necessity of paying off your sister's fortunes compelled me to neglect the necessary repairs not only of this house, which is in an all but tumble-down condition, but of my farms and out-buildings. Four years' income would be absorbed in the outlay indispensable to set all this in order."

But the old head was *too* old for such shallow arguments; and the shoulders were much too young to resist a shrug of impatience.

"Depend upon it, Sir," pleaded Mr. Woolston in reply, "that if there were no Denny Cross in the world, and no Maria Pennington, nothing would induce me to marry for mercenary considerations. As to the terrible prospects you hold out, money for such purposes is easily obtained on mortgage; and to the consequent curtailment of our income, my wife and I will cheerfully submit."

This intimation, and the word "wife," with which it was accompanied, raised the exasperation of the irate old gentleman to its climax.

"Then, by the Lord Almighty," cried he, after swallowing at a gulp the last half of his bumper of

fiery port, "I trust the crazy old roof of this mansion will fall in and crush you both, as a judgment on your ingratitude and rebellion. And never do I wish to see your face again." After which explosion of wrath, and a few expletives very short of decorous on the part of a county magistrate, he started from his chair, and rang the bell for coffee with a degree of violence that brought the venerable butler hobbling into the room, to add, by his rubicund face, another shade of crimson to its glow.

It was no small comfort to the old servant to find Mr. Woolston quietly wiping his mouth with his doily ere he rose from table, instead of engaged in fisticuffs with the author of his days; as, from her ladyship's premature retreat, and the loud summons of the bell, he had half expected. But no sooner had Sir Harry, after ordering coffee in the drawing-room, made as precipitate an exit as his gout would admit, than Mr. Woolston desired that his baggage might be dispatched after him to the neighbouring town of Hurdiston; whither he was about to proceed on foot.

"I have unexpected business in town, Wardlaw, and must take my chance of a place in the mail," said he, in answer to the anxiously inquiring looks of the old man. "As the evening is so fine, a walk will be pleasanter than the phaeton."

A minute afterwards, he stepped quietly out into the shrubbery, as if for an evening stroll; and, once

released from the irritating atmosphere of the stuffy dining-room, the pleasant summer air soon restored the composure which was his habitual characteristic.

And in becoming himself again, John Woolston was forced to admit that his father's opposition was no stronger than he had anticipated. In all the relations of life, Sir Harry, an obstinate old Tory of the most bigoted order, was harsh, dogged, and impracticable: — so long accustomed to have his own way, that he had become as much attached to it as to his shabby old furniture, his dilapidated family mansion, or any other of his belongings. Useless to hope for any change of domestic legislation when he had once laid down the law; and nothing remained for his son and his son's Maria, but to make the best of their over-clouded prospects.

Under such circumstances, it was no small comfort that the Penningtons were not a touchy generation. Devoid of the over-sensitiveness which selfish people dignify by the name of proper pride, they knew that the heir-apparent of Harrals was entitled, in a worldly point of view, to form a better match than with a daughter of Denny Cross; and if they did not sympathise with Sir Harry's resentments, wisely forgave them.

But this was the only point on which the discarded son could reflect with comfort, as he sauntered on towards the high road, under the shade of the Portu-

gal laurels. Though no admonitory chime sounded in his ears from the bells of Hurdiston, he was half inclined to "turn again;" if not to submit himself to his despotic father, at least to take a kindly leave of his mother, of whom he had always been the favourite child. Years might elapse before he again visited Harrals. He might, perhaps, never set foot there again, till his father was laid in the grave. His heart grew sore at the thought. Already, he repented his precipitation.

On reaching the shrubbery gate, of which he had a pass-key, he turned to take a last look of the grim old mansion, the home of his childhood. And, ugly and dreary as it looked now that the sun was no longer shining on its dingy brick walls and narrow stone-coped windows, (which much resembled those of a Hammersmith boarding-school that had lost its way in the fields), his affections yearned towards the old place from which his own wilfulness had driven him forth into banishment.

At that moment, under the influence of a thousand tender family associations, the cottage in the environs of London to which he had been looking forward as the Eden of which his dear Maria was to be the Eve, appeared far less of a Paradise than the gloomy barrack which entitled his family to be styled in the county and the records of the Landed Gentry, as the Woolstons of Harrals! —

CHAPTER II.

In the course of the following month, the County Chronicle duly announced to Sir Harry Woolston, that his son had accomplished his act of rebellion. Among the marriages recorded in its pages, appeared, "John Woolston, Esq., to Maria, daughter of Richard Pennington, Esq., of Denny Cross." — No allusion to Harrals, no mention of his own parentage; and this omission, suggested by motives of delicacy, was resented as an insult.

In after-years, when the matter came to be discussed in the family circle, John Woolston admitted that he had been wrong, in his whole management of the affair. — Had he dispatched one of his brothers-in-law to negociate with his father a cessation of hostilities, the old man, on finding the marriage inevitable, would probably have made the best of it. But in this, as in all other affairs of life, John Woolston had acted more scrupulously than wisely. He had persisted in fulfilling his engagements to Maria Pennington, because conscious that he had sought and won her affections. And he forbore to involve the husbands of his sisters in his father's displeasure, because it was clear that something more than the five-and-twenty thousand

pounds already decreed to them, must have been saved out of the eight thousand per annum enjoyed for a period of seven-and-thirty years, by a man who scarcely expended three; and who grudged the outlay of a few pounds on brick and mortar to keep his roof weather-tight over his head. It was expected, in short, that the more than thrifty baronet would die rich; and John Woolston felt that the interests of his sisters, and their families, ought not to be compromised.

And thus, a permanent feud was established between the father and son. Even those who disliked Sir Harry Woolston, and they were already numerous, with ample "power to add to their number," blamed the contumacious John. Filial impiety has few partizans; and without entering into the cause of the quarrel, the neighbours who found Harrals becoming more dreary and inhospitable every year, saw strong grounds for deploring the act which had transferred the matrimonial establishment of its heir-apparent to a weedy villa at Hendon.

The young *ménage*, however, spent its cheerful Christmas at Denny Cross, and its first summer at Hastings; while Harrals proceeded to shut up two sides of its heavy old quadrangle, from which the bricks were gradually disengaging themselves, for want of new pointing; and lay encumbering the flagstones beneath, like the unripe fruit under a plum-tree.

The three daughters of Sir Harry Woolston — one of whom was married to the second son of a nobleman, one, to the curate of the parish, and one to a man, whose means and origin were as equivocal as his manners and exterior were prepossessing — affected to remain neutral in the family quarrel. But all comfort in their visits to Harrals was destroyed; and Maple Hill, the retreat of the offending couple, was too small to afford them a welcome by-way of compensation. The result was complete estrangement.

For a time, Woolston and his wife were too happy in each other to look beyond the sweet-briar hedge of their villa. Like bees, they lived in winter upon the honey hived during their long summer. And when a little hazel-eyed girl was born to them, whom they ventured to name Janetta, after Lady Woolston, the proud barrister counted up his gains at the close of the circuit, and rejoiced to find that they formed a tolerably satisfactory addition to his narrow income.

For the baronet showed no signs of relenting. He had perhaps the plea that his son refrained from all demonstration of penitence. Like most inveterate port-bibbers who have passed their allotted threescore years and ten, he was becoming muzzy and morose; dozing through his evenings, and grumbling through his mornings; more especially if anything occurred to disturb the dull routine of his life: — as a

stone thrown into a stagnant pond discomposes its scummy surface.

Neither of his three sons-in-law would have ventured to provoke one of these angry outbreaks, by mentioning the name of the banished John; which the constituted authorities of Harrals seemed resolved to dismiss into oblivion.

Gerald Molyneux, the husband of Emma, the eldest daughter, was too fine a gentleman to embark in family squabbles. Harpsden, the curate, who was looking forward to a living at the hands of Sir Harry, when entreated by his gentle Caroline to interfere in her brother's behalf, pleaded the interests of their little boy. As to Wroughton and Clara, they were living too gay a life on the continent to trouble their heads about the young couple at Hendon, or the old couple at Harrals. And thus, everything went on; the mortar dropping from the walls, the tiles from the roof; and from the hearts of the father and son, every trace of mutual attachment. — An unnatural state of things; — beginning with a fault, and ending almost in crime.

Three years had elapsed since the dispute in the stuffy dining-room, when the little villa at Hendon resounded with the squalls of a second baby. And this time, a son and heir. Yet, such was the obstinacy which John Woolston inherited, if he inherited nothing else, from the dogged old baronet, that he persisted in

avoiding all allusion to his family honours, when inscribing for the "Times," among the births of the day, "the lady of J. Woolston, Esq., of a boy." And lo! the advent of a child in whose honour an ox, or at all events a sheep or two, would have been roasted whole, had it seen the light, as in heirship bound, under the canopy of one of the old-fashioned state beds of Harrals, was commemorated only by a bottle of Cape wine, and a home-made cake, in the meagre establishment at Maple Hill.

For the income of the Woolstons had not increased with their family. The young wife, delicate and indolent, had usually a sister from Denny Cross staying with her, to assist in the nursing and housekeeping; and poor John, a little sick of omnibus transit between Hendon and his chambers, and a little dispirited for want of the club, from which he had made it a point of conscience to withdraw his name and subscription, began to think it might have been wiser if, in the onset, conciliatory measures had restored him to the comfort and decencies of Harrals. But, as people usually say on such occasions, "it was too late *now*." The pettish spirit of independence which had so little availed him, must, for the sake of consistency, be persevered in.

No one was at hand to remonstrate. The Molyneuxes were engrossed by their aristocratic connexions and enjoyments; the Wroughtons were still on

the continent; the Harpsdens absorbed in parsonage cares. As to Mrs. Woolston's humbler family and friends, they were satisfied to have their dear Maria and her children back among them at Denny Cross, to enjoy Christmas cheer, and probably Midsummer recreation, without inquiring too curiously how the interim was passed.

Had John Woolston entertained the smallest solicitude concerning the ultimate welfare of his children, he would probably have taken steps for their restoration to the position they had innocently forfeited. But the little cherub in the cockaded cap had only now to grow and prosper, and ultimately succeed to the honours of a baronetcy, and eight thousand a year; in the comfortable conviction of which, John Woolston stepped daily into the bus which conveyed him to Temple Bar; indifferent to the minor miseries of unvarnished boots and an ill-brushed hat; and far more deeply interested in in-coming fees, than in the resentments and dilapidations of Harrals.

CHAPTER III.

On the day of little Johnny's christening, however, the discarded son became conscious, almost for the first time, that he was decidedly in the wrong.

From the moment of welcoming the little fellow to his modest wicker cradle, he regarded him less as the second child of his happy wedlock, than as the heir-in-tail to the family estates; and the sort of consequence he assigned to his infant, seemed to retrace itself through his own veins to those of his father. However lightly he had hitherto affected to hold the hereditary rank and fortune of the Woolstons, now that he had subsided into a mere link in the chain that was to unite their name with posterity, he began to exaggerate its importance.

This son of his, who squalled so lustily when invested in the christening-robe worked by his Denny Cross aunts, and already worn by his sister an occasion of a similar solemnity, might perhaps live to aggrandise the family hereditaments. Little Johnny need not marry imprudently. Little Johnny need not extinguish himself on the threshold of life. Nay, he might perhaps live to become a peer of the realm, and increase the Harrals estate by the Walsingham pro-

perty adjoining; long coveted by the reigning baronet, who had waited and parleyed for thirty years, in hopes to get it a bargain.

Yet, in spite of all these prospective honours, and lacking the ox roasted whole for immediate distribution, and the stout October that ought to have been brewed, with a view to his coming of age, the world in general cared as little for the birth of John Woolston the Second, as for that of the last-born pauper in the parish union. Even the heart of his proud father was darkened on the morning of the christening, by a letter from his coal-merchant, requesting that the amount of his over-due Christmas bill might be settled without further delay.

But it was not alone the peremptory tone of the dealer in Screened Walls-end, or even the careless one in which the baptismal ceremony was gabbled over by an over-tasked curate, that produced his humiliation of spirit. His brother-in-law, Harpsden, formerly, when the suitor of Caroline Woolston, so obsequious and affectionate, had evaded, by shuffling excuses, a journey to town to officiate at his nephew's christening; while Mrs. Molyneux acquainted her brother, in a few reckless lines, that Gerald and herself found it impossible to quit Molyneux Castle before the close of the hunting season, to stand sponsors for the boy. As to Wroughton and Clara, they had not

so much as troubled themselves to answer the letter announcing the birth of an heir to Harrals.

Poor Woolston ceased therefore to wonder, since his own kith and kin stood aloof, that his mere acquaintances were growing cooler and cooler. Ignorant of the nature of the Harrals entail, people concluded, from appearances, that the offended son was actually disinherited; and the nods of the great, whom he accidentally encountered, became more and more patronising; and the coldness of the ungracious, more icy.

Already sore from the consciousness of a pinched and needy household, these slights galled him severely. He had not greatness of soul to rise superior to such petty annoyances. Few people have, to whom it is impossible to pay their coal-merchant's bill. Nor did he take into account that it was less the poor man who was avoided by his acquaintance, than the careworn. To be seen walking with an individual in a seedy coat, is not half so unsatisfactory to a man of the world, as to waste his time on a companion half-a-year behind the events of the day; to whom everything, from heavy politics to trifling gossip, must be unfolded and explained; and who, for want of animal spirits, is as flat as a glass of stale soda-water. For a mere acquaintance, accepted only for purposes of mutual entertainment, has no right to be a bore; and *if* a bore, is dealt with accordingly.

There were moments, indeed, when Woolston,

smarting under neglect and privation, felt inclined to forestal the future affluence awaiting him, by a post-obit levy; of sufficient amount, to convince the world that eventual prosperity would enable him to repay its courtesies, or return it scorn for scorn. But prudence prevailed. He had always promised himself to succeed to an estate unencumbered by any act of profligacy or prodigality: and he would not secede from his principle. He would go bearing on. Maria must content herself to turn the old silk gown so long her Sunday best. He was almost proud of his own seedy coat. As to the coal-merchant's bill, it should be paid by instalments.

Another year, however, found him less hearty, and far less philosophical. Though his income was punctually paid by his father's banker, it was unaccompanied by a word of comment, or overture of kindness; and Sir Harry, like a stag-horned tree, seemed deeper rooted by every additional year. It appeared to invigorate the constitution of the vindictive old man, to know that by the prolongation of his days, he could still punish his son. The grim face of poverty, meanwhile, was acquiring new features at Maple Hill. The little boy proved an ailing child. The air of the weedy villa did not agree with him; and a suburban apothecary, unable to fortify, per force of pharmacopœia, the little fellow's infirm constitution, suggested sea-bathing as indispensable.

Ten weeks at Brighton added something considerable to the quarter's expenses. But they also produced something so nearly resembling bloom on the pale cheeks of the sickly child, that, early in the following spring, the prescription was renewed. And as the scanty professional engagements of John Woolston, "promising more hereafter," rendered it hazardous for him to absent himself from town, his wife was forced to submit to a temporary separation.

It was one of those cold, rainy, backward springs, which suggest a wish that winter would retain its own rough name, in order that one might be on one's guard against its harshness. After a few severe colds, produced by trudging homewards in the mud because no place was to be had in the omnibus, poor Woolston, as much out of sorts with the elements as King Lear, placed a placard of "To be Let Furnished" on the top of his garden wall, and a terse advertisement to the same effect in the "Supplement to the Times:" and proceeded to establish himself in his chambers in the Temple, till the return of his family.

But unluckily, the place proved as little attractive to the public as to its master, and hung heavy on his hands. Nothing seemed to go well with him. Domestic care rendered him listless in his profession. Few people like to entrust their business to a man who seems incapable of managing his own. If it be true

that "nothing succeeds like success," nothing is so unsuccessful as mischance.

One day, in passing Hoare's banking-house, as he was sauntering along the Strand, he was run against by a spruce, well-dressed man, rushing across the pavement to an equally well-varnished cab; who, on pausing to apologize, proved to be his brother-in-law, Gerald Molyneux.

An affectation of surprise and a few civil inquiries after Mrs. Woolston and the children, were indispensable; though the Honourable Gerald had evidently little inclination to be seen talking to a man who owed so little to his tailor — except his bill.

And when they had shaken hands, and shaken each other off, while John Woolston proceeded moodily to his Temple dinner, the fashionable husband of his sister Emma was shrugging his shoulders at the quizzicality of the distressed family man.

"By the time old Woolston drops, of which he seems to have no thoughts at present," mused he, as he drove back to his bright little Belgravian home, "John will have become an irretrievable snob. All's up with poor John! That wretched match has crushed him, root and branch. And I'm *really* sorry for it. The October shooting at Harrals is far from despicable. And if John had turned out what he ought, and modernised the system of the house, a month or

so in the year, there, might have been a pleasant resource to us."

It did not occur to him, meanwhile, that a cheerful dinner might be acceptable to the brother-in-law who had informed him that his family was at Ramsgate. Even if it had, he would have been puzzled to supply it; for he lived a life of surface, not unusual with Honourable younger brothers, labouring under domestic felicity: dining out three or four days in the week; while on the off-days, the husband fared sumptuously at his club, and the wife contented herself with a solitary chicken.

The split between John Woolston and his fellow-creatures, meanwhile, was becoming wider and wider. The influence of a contracted purse infected his whole nature, and he was growing narrow-minded and morose. The character of his wife remained undeteriorated, for, a stranger to luxury, a little discomfort was amply compensated by her happiness as a wife and mother; and anxiety for her sick boy excluded all meaner cares. To accompany her children in their daily stroll on the sands, and indite to their father a bulletin of their health, was recreation enough for Maria; and that her bonnet was shabby, or her mutton chop tough and smoky, passed unobserved.

But it was not so with her husband. *He* missed his cheerful club — his stall at the opera — his Epsom and Ascot — prime sherry and fruity claret; and was

already beginning to fancy this work-a-day world a far less pleasant place than of yore.

There was but one of its inhabitants, however, to whom he felt disposed to confide his disappointment, the far-famed Roger Farmer, of whom he had been the favourite pupil; a man who, having amassed in his profession a noble fortune, had exhibited the rare disinterestedness of declining one of the highest and most lucrative honours of the law.

But at the period of his marriage, Farmer, himself the type of celibacy, had assumed the privilege conveyed by nearly a score of years' seniority, to assure him, in the plainest English, that the best of marriages was a risk; and one of doubtful advantage, an act of insanity. So far from accepting scruples of conscience as a justification of his folly, the old bachelor pleaded as earnestly as if he had been defending a case of breach of promise of marriage, that to honour his father and his mother was a far more stringent duty than to sacrifice his prospects in life to a country miss; in atonement for having whispered in a ball-room sweet nonsense, to which she was nothing loth to listen.

These counsels, often repeated, and every time with less and less of the foreign aid of ornament, had at length provoked the wilful young lover into sarcastic retorts. And thus, the friendship between him and the man of whose understanding he thought most highly

in the world, had cooled into estrangement; and now that the crisis of repentance predicted by the cynic had actually arrived, how was he to find courage for seeking his old friend, to acknowledge that the bloom had fallen from the roses of his Eden, and that he found himself encompassed by a hedge of thorns? —

Yet Farmer, bitter as he sometimes was, would have afforded him the kindest as well as the best of counsel. Though firm enough to use the scalpel fearlessly, when occasion needed, no hand could deal more gently the healing unguent. He liked John Woolston as much as he was capable of liking anything not bound in vellum or printed by Elzevir; and it would have afforded him real pleasure to find his former pupil seated once more by his fireside.

To the end of time, however, would Woolston, instigated by false pride and self-love, have kept aloof, but that, among the few briefs entrusted to him, there chanced to be one arising out of an anterior suit, in which Farmer had been concerned as senior counsel. And though the wealthy lawyer, content with the fine fortune he had amassed, declined all further business, his advice appeared of such moment to Woolston, to whom the trial was likely to afford a touchstone of professional credit, that he ventured to dispatch a letter to the oracle; to "Dear Farmer" him, as in their days of former friendship; and demand his opinion as frankly as he would have sought a sunbeam from the sun.

Within half-an-hour, the gaunt figure of Roger Farmer, not a whit or an hour the worse for the four intervening years, was deposited in Woolston's thread-bare arm-chair; entering into the details of the impending cause with a searching acuteness of intellect which imparted instantaneous light to all that was previously obscure. After diving into the vast ocean of his memory, the man learned in the law brought up the pearl. No one who listened to Farmer's perspicuous interpretation could dream of an appeal.

While business was discussed between them, not so much as the wink of an eyelash did the elder lawyer vouchsafe to any extraneous object. The dusty, disorderly room, so little in accordance with his pupil's former habits, was non-existent to him. He saw nothing of the scattered papers, the mouldy inkstand, the cindery grate, the broken blind, or the ragged hearth rug. But when the last word was said and the last note taken, *in re* Rothley *versus* Barnstable, he suddenly observed, "Your father, I am sorry to find, has not come round, Woolston? — Where are your wife and children? — You have never brought them to see me." —

In a moment, the stream gushed from the rock. Unasked, John Woolston proceeded to repeat all his grievances; and poor Farmer, after buttoning up his coat, sat and listened, as resignedly as though the fire were not out and the afternoon more than chilly.

"The old story, the old story!" muttered he, when the plaintiff had said his say, at least, twice over. "After giving the utmost offence, where you owed implicit obedience, you have made no overtures for reconciliation. I don't wonder to find you on such bad terms with yourself, after such a succession of blunders. But come and dine with me, to-day, John; and let us talk over old times, and try to patch up the future. I should like to be able to send good news of you to a kinsman of yours, with whom I made acquaintance, last autumn, at Liverpool, (while treating with him for the purchase of some Cheshire farms); — the quaintest old fellow I ever met; — but worth his weight in diamond dust."

"One of the Wraysburys, of course. My mother was a Liverpool woman; — indebted to a counting-house for her fifty thousand pounds."

"A fact which both her ladyship and your father appear to have forgotten. My queer acquaintance, old Adam Wraysbury, informed me that, from the day of his marriage, Sir Harry had sent his wife's family to Coventry; and that Harrals might lie in Mesopotamia, for anything he knew or cared."

"But how came he to mention us at all, to a perfect stranger?"

"Because, in the room where we were examining our title-deeds, there hung, among a tolerable collection of pictures, the portrait of a youth, by Kneller,

bearing so singular a resemblance to yourself, that I was forced to apologise to the old gentleman for the interest it excited, by informing him that, but for the date and dress, I should conceive it to be the likeness of one of my pupils; who, had he not been the only son of a wealthy Northamptonshire baronet, would probably have risen to the bench.

"'Not John Woolston, surely?' cried my host. And on my answering in the affirmative, 'Natural enough,' was his reply; — 'the portrait is that of his great grandfather.' —"

Deeply gratified by Farmer's careless compliment, which afforded him the only thrill of pleasure he had experienced for months, Woolston hesitated to pursue his inquiries.

But the quick eye of the old lawyer had already detected not only his momentary emotion, but his profound depression.

"Come and dine with me to-day, and I will tell you some remarkable traits of this quaint kinsman of yours," said he. "No, not at Lincoln's Inn," he added, in reply to Woolston's inquiring look; "at my new chambers, in the Albany. Old Margaret, whom you used to call Mrs. Dalgairns, migrated with me when I abjured the law and its domains; and is as good a hand as ever at pepper-pot. The old Léoville, too, is none the worse for its transit. Half-past six, therefore;

and as long an evening as your business engagements will admit."

Woolston's engagements, alas! admitted of a *very* long evening: and on his return from the retired lawyer's cheerful apartments, to his own fusty, sordid, ill-conditioned chamber, he could not recollect that a word had passed touching the originalities of old Adam Wraysbury. But, in addition to some excellent claret, he had imbibed a vein of equally genuine philosophy. Old Farmer was one of those who, regarding this world as a place where much work is to be done, but where enjoyments physical and moral abound in proportion, — a field which it depends upon ourselves to clear of brambles and plant with fruit and flowers, — scouted the idea of despondency. He denounced it as the cowardice of a diseased mind. To *him*, a hypped man was a fit inmate for a hospital; and he endeavoured to cheer his young friend into nobler thoughts and better feelings.

"You contemplate your duties and destinies as confined to too low a sphere, my dear Woolston," argued he. "A very short distance before you, lie prospects equally permanent and brilliant, for which half the men in the kingdom would be thankful. Your birthright, both of intellect and fortune, secures you eminence. Meanwhile, if you be not too proud to accept the offer, my house and purse are open to you. Nay, if you *be* too proud, as that sudden flush upon your

cheek leads me to fear, you shall pay me interest for my money, Sir; a fraction more, too, than I can obtain from public securities, and thus confer an obligation, instead of receiving one."

Warm thanks were all that old Farmer received in return for his offer. It was not in the nature of Woolston to accept the aid of a friend as generously as it was offered. All he promised was, that, in any extremity, he would apply to Farmer rather than to another person.

"You had best, I can tell you," rejoined the old lawyer, shaking his hand cordially at parting, "or, by Jupiter! I will write a begging-letter in your name to old Adam Wraysbury, and humble your false pride in the dust."

CHAPTER IV.

THE elation derived by the solitary barrister from this renewal of friendship with a man he esteemed so highly, was of short continuance. To the utter injury of his professional duties, he was shortly afterwards summoned to Ramsgate. The united fortitude of Mrs. Woolston and her sister was not equal to a domestic calamity, to which the sickliness of the little boy assigned peculiar importance. Both children were dangerously ill of scarlet fever; and Sophia feared that their mother also was sickening.

Poor Woolston started directly; and in the course of what was then a long journey, deeply regretted that he had not profited by Farmer's liberal offers of pecuniary aid. He would gladly have procured London advice for those darling children. The report of their condition made by the Ramsgate doctor was alarming, and malignant scarlet fever was just then fatally prevalent. His conscience felt rebuked for having assigned undue importance to money-cares that could only endure for a day: whereas the loss of either of the three so dear to him, would be a calamity indeed. He had not, till that moment, understood the force of his family affections. But the mists arising out of

business-life and worldly interests, cleared off in a moment. At the thought of their danger, Harrals and the Court of Chancery became non-existent. The earth seemed to contain only three human forms — three loving human beings bearing his name.

It was dusk when he reached Ramsgate; — dusk even in spite of that clearer atmosphere affording, by comparison with his murky court in the Temple, a second day. But in his heart, was the shadow of night. When he proposed to walk to his lodgings from the inn where the coach stopped, on pretence of stretching his limbs, but in reality to delay his knowledge of the worst, the very ostler perceived him to be so incapable of the effort, that he placed the "gentleman and his baggage," almost peremptorily, in a fly; and dispatched them to their address.

John Woolston's presentiments had not deceived him. — The boy was dead! — But the mother and her little daughter were in the utmost danger; which deadened or suspended the effect of the sad event. Dear Maria — the loving wife — the tender mother — parched with fever, gasping for breath, unconscious of all that was passing around her, had a stronger claim upon his tears than the little marble figure extended white and motionless on the matress of its cot.

After the manner of his sex, John Woolston's first impulse on recovering his self-possession, was to find fault. Poor Sophy Pennington, half stupefied by sorrow

and terror, was severely called to account for not having sooner summoned him from town; though, till the eruption made its appearance the preceding night, neither of the medical men in attendance had surmised the fearful nature of the sore throat, of which the two children had been complaining. But, — also after the manner of his sex, — he gave up all for lost, even now that the doctors, aware of the character of the malady, were better able to oppose their skill to its ravages. Even when, the following afternoon, they asserted that Mrs. Woolston's fever was abating, and the bad symptoms of little Netta diminished, he remained hopelesssly convinced that a single grave was about to engulph all that was dear to him on earth.

Poor soft-hearted, and not very hard-headed, Sophy Pennington, was wiser. Though, when informed that her sister was on the road to recovery, she gave free vent to the tears, which, at the worst, she had been incapable of shedding, she was comforted. A few hours' rest fortified her for her labours to come; the task of nursing a fractious child, and breaking to the poor mother the fact that one of her treasures was lost to her for ever.

Neither the temper nor the understanding of John Woolston was brightened by adversity. His troubled mind, like water ruffled by a storm, gave back distorted reflections. As he escorted the little grey coffin of his boy to the cemetery of a Kentish bathing-place, he

felt that it was not *there* the destined representative of the Woolstons of Harrals ought to repose; ascribing to the vindictive character of his father, a circumstance for which he was himself chiefly responsible.

To none of his family, meanwhile, did he think proper to notify the loss he had sustained. They had evinced no interest in the living child. Why molest them by acquainting them that it was at rest? While seated by his poor wife's bedside, watching her convalescence, he scarcely deserved the blessing; so bitterly unchristian were his feelings of resentment.

When the invalid was well enough to be removed to the sofa, — a day how eventful in the annals of the sick room, — and it became necessary to modify the joy with which poor Maria hailed this epoch of her recovery, by affording some explanation of the saddened faces of her husband and sister, Sophia had judiciously prepared for the disclosure, by placing the little girl, now nearly restored to health, by her mother's side. And so justly had she calculated, that, after the first natural burst of maternal grief, the bereaved mother did not refuse to be comforted.

"God has taken from us the one least fitted to contend with the struggles of life," said she, in a voice still faint and feeble. "So long as this darling is left to us, dear husband, let us resign ourselves without a murmur, lest the wrath of the Almighty again overtake us."

The afflicted and disappointed father endeavoured to comply; and if he still murmured, it was solely against the cold-heartedness of his unaffectionate family. In that chamber, where the only sounds which had as yet been sanctioned by the authorities, were the singing of the kettle or the ticking of the watch, it was impossible to silence his hoarse declarations, that, when in the enjoyment of his property, not one of his kith or kin should ever cross his threshold.

"I have received twice as much kindness, Sophy, from you and your family, in the course of the last four years," muttered he to his sister-in-law, "as from those in whose veins my blood is flowing."

When the moment arrived for change of air to be desirable, Denny Cross was not backward in renewing its good offices. No other house, perhaps, would have opened its gates to welcome the infected family; and as the weedy villa was let till the autumn, right thankful was Woolston when the letter of Richard Pennington arrived, bidding him bring down his wife and child to spend the summer at what he kindly called their "home."

"If your professional duties call you to town, my dear John," wrote the warm-hearted squire, "trust me to take good care of my daughter and grand-daughter, during your absence."

And what a comfort to the poor, wasted, and faint-hearted wife, in her bombazine and broad hems, to be

welcomed to the plain, unceremonious abode, where peace and plenty prevailed. How she wondered that, when abiding there in her girlhood, she had ever sighed after Harrals!

Even the depressed Woolston felt cheered when he saw his wife and child surrounded by those who loved them; the two kind sisters who were never weary of listening to details of poor little Johnny's last moments and earliest ailments. How little he heeded the homely corduroys and lanky locks of the man out of livery, whom none of them had ever dreamed of calling butler! — How little did he care that the old squire persisted in spelling disappointment with a couple of ss and a single p! —

He had some difficulty indeed in tearing himself away from the scene of his boyish courtship, and present consolation. But it was necessary he should return to town. Though he had remitted his business, ad interim, to the care of an eminent brother barrister, yet, having held no communication with even his clerk since his domestic bereavement, or even furnished him with his change of address, it was indispensable that he should make his appearance at chambers.

On his arrival, he found, of course, like all people who have been long absent from home, a pile of unsatisfactory letters. Though the solicitors with whom he was in communication, had been, according to his desire, referred to Mr. Armit, innumerable were the

missives on his table, indited with the clerkly flourish of capitals, peculiar to the shop-keeper's desk. These he flung aside, to be examined at leisure. But among them were two, addressed in the same hand-writing; written on black-edged paper, and sealed with a mourning seal smelling of solder, and exhibiting such antiquated dimensions as to attract his notice. Nothing of the London tradesman about *them:* — nothing of the advertising speculator, touting for custom. — The epistles were as provincial in their cut, as though folded and addressed in the town-hall of some country borough.

With a heavy sigh, he threw himself into a chair and deliberately unfolded, *not* an envelope, but a quarto sheet of blue wire-wove; such as, under the tyranny of his first preparatory school, he had been compelled to overscrawl half-yearly, with what was called a holiday-letter to his parents; and lo! the first lines that met his eye, contained words of reprehension.—

"Messrs. Wortham and Stock, of Liverpool, being greatly surprised at receiving no answer to their letter of the 21st ult., trusted that Mr. Woolston would either honour them with immediate instructions, or place them in communication with his man of business."

Evidently a dun! Yet he owed no man any thing in Liverpool. What could it mean? Poor John sighed a still deeper sigh while proceeding to open the letter alluded to of "the 21st ult.," which ought to have

come first to hand; the contents of which actually stunned him with amazement.

From the epoch of his marriage, never had he been addressed in terms so deferential. But surely it could not be the emotion arising from such empty homage that caused his colour to vary so strangely and his hand to tremble, as he perused the voluminous epistle? Nay, that, long before he reached the concluding signature and customary assurance of obedience and humility on the part of the writer, obliged him to lean back in his chair, to acquire breath and courage for the issue? — For the demand made upon him was neither for pounds, shillings, nor pence; but simply for early instructions concerning his administration to the will of the late Adam Wraysbury, gentleman (a word seldom used except to indicate questionable gentility), to which he was appointed sole executor. "The probate duty," the family solicitor thought it necessary to assure him, "would amount to a sum of between eighty and ninety thousand pounds, the mode of raising which, would require his immediate consideration."

On reaching this clause of the letter, John Woolston, with a peevish shrug of the shoulders, was about to throw it aside. The very quotation of such a sum seemed an insult to a man under the necessity of shirking his coal-merchant's bill; for that he could be answerable for Adam Wraysbury's estate otherwise than as executor, did not even occur to him. The old

gentleman had probably bequeathed a considerable portion of his property to his niece, Lady Woolston; and selected her son, rather than her husband, whom he detested, to see it equitably administered.

But considering how deeply his feelings were moved as he proceeded, it proved highly judicious, on the part of the formal Liverpool solicitors, to have taken so much time and prose to place him in possession of the fact that he was appointed residuary legatee, as well as executor, and that the sole legacies interfering with his remaindership, consisted of a few thousand pounds to charitable institutions, and one thousand to each of his nephews and nieces, for the purchase of mourning rings, as a memorial of A. W., gent.

As if any one of them were likely to forget an uncle who, having a million and a half to dispose of, had passed them over individually and collectively, to heap the mass of his fortune on the head of the contemned John! —

The whole amount producing, as at present invested, an income of sixty-seven thousand and a fraction per annum, was bound up by a strict entail to descend to the second son of John Woolston's marriage with the daughter of Richard Pennington, of Denny Cross; or, lacking a second son, to their eldest daughter, so as to secure it against commixture with the property of the surly baronet, by whom old Adam considered himself slighted and aggrieved.

It required more than one or even two perusals of so wonder-striking a document, to enable the startled man to master and realise its contents. But when he had fully satisfied himself that he was the dupe of no illusion, that the letter was clearly authentic, and that he was actually in possession of a million and a half of money, he exhibited, alas! neither the equanimity of a philosopher, nor the thankfulness of a Christian. — Had his wife and child been at hand to be pressed to his bosom, his heart might have expanded. As it was, having only within reach a fidgety clerk in the adjoining office, and a dirty old woman in the kitchen, he might be excused for the caution with which he carefully locked up the letter in his desk, and kept silence, yea, even from good words.

Within half an hour, he was on his road to Liverpool; having indited a few hasty lines to Denny Cross, stating that unexpected business called him from town. The fidgety clerk, to whom he did not vouchsafe even this information, began to fear, indeed, that his employer's wits must be failing him. For Mr. Woolston had silenced all his appeals for instruction concerning his business during his absence, by sending them headlong to the spot with which his learned profession is said to be only too intimately familiar.

CHAPTER V.

As extremes meet, the effects of a sudden stroke of good fortune often resemble those of a sudden stroke of evil. John Woolston was all but stupefied by the startling transition of his destinies from iron to gold. Though it was Midsummer, — plenteous, beauteous Midsummer, — he never once remarked, in his transit from the banks of the Thames to those of the Mersey, so much as that the earth was green, or that the skies were blue.

The journey, though even then curtailed by railway acceleration, was of eight hours' continuance. Yet it scarcely sufficed for the mental arithmetic of the practical John. His professional experience supplied him with a thousand minor uneasinesses. These old-fashioned country attorneys, who addressed him with such obsequious civility and seemed at present to be sole custodians of his untold treasures, were probably harpies of the first magnitude. He must keep a sharp watch over their proceedings, and assume the reins of government with an unswerving hand; or to what spoliation might he not be exposed by his utter ignorance of the nature and amount of his uncle's property! Already he began to wonder whether it

consisted chiefly in land, or had been invested in government securities, or private speculations. He had heard, vaguely and with indifference, nay, perhaps with some degree of the contempt for commercial pursuits inherent in the blood of all the Woolstons, that the Wraysburys were largely connected with houses in New York and New Orleans. But, as far as was in his power, he would realise and consolidate the estate. The vicissitudes of mercantile life were not suited to his taste.

Already, a cubit was added to his stature. The golden leaven was fermenting in his veins. — Mammon had marked him for his own! —

The only feeling likely to neutralise these mercenary influences, arose from anticipating the benefits secured by his accession of fortune to his patient wife and promising little girl; to say nothing of the hearty joy about to animate the honest family at Denny Cross.

But alas! no sooner did his thoughts revert from them and their homely happiness, to Harrals and its animosities, than his heart hardened again. The vindictive old man who had screwed him down in durance, — the inert mother, who had raised neither voice nor hand to resist the tyranny by which her eldest-born had been exiled from his place at their fireside, and *his* eldest-born from his place in the family vault, — and whose envious feelings were about

to receive a death-blow in the announcement of the preference accorded him by his opulent kinsman, — were never, *never* to be forgiven.

As to his sisters and their husbands, so long as they breathed, never would he overlook their neglect of his unpretending wife and suffering boy! Not so much as a particle — not so much as a single bright reflection of his heaps of coin, — should lighten their comparative darkness.

Already, as we said before, the golden leprosy was beginning to corrode the nature of John Woolston.

Nor were these narrow sentiments likely to be ennobled by contact with the cringing attorneys, who, after submitting for thirty years to the bearish despotism of old Wraysbury, were prepared to accept from the hands of his representative any amount of contumely. Habituated to the most vulgar species of insolence — that of purse-pride — Wortham and Stock were too much surprised to find John Woolston commonly courteous, to notice that he was guarded and distrustful. When they offered their smirking congratulations on so vast an accession of wealth, he answered never a word. When they offered their whimpering condolences on the loss of his much-respected relative, he was equally silent. And, while he despised their hypocrisy, and mistrusted their servility, they probably decided within themselves that the rising young barrister, whose phrases had a mar-

ketable value, had already acquired a habit of economising his words.

They *did*, however, begin to suspect that he was not without his share in the oddities of Wraysbury nature, when, in the midst of their explanation of the steps they had been forced to take in consequence of his inexplicable inattention to their letters, they saw him snatch a candle from the table, and hold it high aloft for the better contemplation of an old-fashioned family picture, which they had passed over unregarded, as long as they could remember; but which the newly-inheriting heir was already examining with the interest due to the key-stone of his fortunes.

It afforded him no small comfort that his benefactor had been laid in the grave previous to his arrival. Mr. Wraysbury's will having contained explicit instructions as to the spot and manner of his interment, which he desired should take place within four days of his decease, his solicitors had complied with his injunctions. John Woolston was consequently relieved from that painful sense of the presence of death, which rebukes all worldly solicitudes; and there was nothing to obstruct his scrutiny of the strange, unsightly old premises, the dirt and discomfort of which were so unaccountably at variance with the overflowing riches of the man for whom parsimony appeared to have constituted a luxury in itself.

While Messieurs Wortham and Stock were ne-

gociating with the banking firm in which Adam Wraysbury had been for years a sleeping partner, the tens of thousands indispensable to enable his heir to appropriate to himself his hundreds of thousands, Woolston gave his whole attention to the papers and personalty of the deceased.

It was clear that, till within a few years of his end, Adam Wraysbury had contemplated matrimony; or, at all events, a settlement in life accordant with his splendid income. With house-agents and land-agents, he had commenced a series of treaties for a more suitable residence; usually breaking off at the last moment negociations which regarded the investment of some enormous sum, on a quibble or dispute for a few hundreds. In the midst of his household discomfort, too, the old man had amassed materials for a mode of existence almost epicurean. A princely service of plate lay tarnished in his cellars. Warrants for bonded hogsheads of the most costly wines, lay dusty in his bureau. Webs of Gobelin tapestry, and Aubusson carpets were piled, moth-eaten and mouldy, in his lumber-rooms; and articles of furniture of the most luxurious nature were scattered about in dim and mildewed attics, waiting a more appropriate domicile. Here and there, some fine statue, neglected and forgotten on its pedestal, had been appropriated by low-conditioned servants as a clothes-horse, or drying post; while pictures which had cost thousands

to the penurious old man, who grudged not the purchase, because, aware that he could at any moment sell them again at a high premium, he regarded them simply as an investment, were turned with their faces to the wall, to secure them from dust in an atmosphere that corroded the very canvas. And now, the master's eye, which had never revelled in their beauties, was closed for ever; and John Woolston, as he gazed on the mouldy and rat-gnawn frames, felt for the first time sensitively alive to the Scriptural injunction against laying up treasures that moth and rust do corrupt.

But the closer his insight into the magnitude of his inheritance, the greater his wonder that his father so money-loving as to have banished his only son for an improvident marriage, should have neglected the fountain-head of such a Pactolus. Adam Wraysbury's constant announcement of matrimonial intentions, and his proximity to an extensive family of equally mercenary nephews and nieces, had probably blinded Sir Harry to future contingencies; or, more probably still, the offence given to the old merchant had been risked at a period of life when human clay has not altogether degenerated into mud, and the rank weeds of our vices and degenerations have not enrooted themselves inextricably in the soil. When the shabby old Sir Harry who succeeded to Sir Harry the jolly fox-hunter, began to perceive that ingots were ingots, even if amassed in a Liverpool counting-house, it was

too late. He had lost that "tide in the affairs of man, which, taken at the flood," &c., &c., &c.

"But for my father's blunder in throwing down the cards before the game was up," mused John Woolston, "or rather but for his narrow-mindedness in refusing to dig in the mine into which he had not scrupled to sink a shaft, I might never have stood in his shoes. And yet," continued he, — his own self-love shrinking from the idea of being beholden to even a blunder of his father for his present property, — "had it not been for Roger Farmer's good offices, one of those bull-headed cousins, to whom I was introduced this morning, and who bowed down before me as though to the golden calf, might have been preferred. — Who can say? — Who, *who* can say? — In such success as this world brings about, how difficult to decide on the *primum mobile*. 'Fortune,' says the proverb, 'visits us in our sleep.' And heaven knows, she found *me* involved in slumbers sufficiently uneasy."

In addition to the "bull-headed cousins," who, with grudging in their hearts, treated him with such servile reverence, Mr. Woolston found himself thrust into acquaintance with hosts of strangers, who called themselves friends of the late Mr. Wraysbury; men who had despised his crotchety vagaries while living, and who wondered at them, now he was dead; but not more than the new heir, at the almost American ab-

ruptness of their tone, and complexity of their projects. He had never met with such people among the Northamptonshire squires. He had never met with such people among his sharp-witted professional brethren. But, looking upon them as the parents of railways, and sponsors for steam-navigation, — sires of Australia, and other golden worlds which Raleigh himself failed to appropriate, — he admitted the potentiality of the hand which he felt some scruple about shaking.

Nor did it require many days to render the old house as distasteful to him as was the company of his new associates.

> For over all, there hung a cloud of fear,
> A sense of mystery the spirit daunted;
> And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
> The place is haunted!

not haunted, like the crime-desecrated mansion so graphically described by poor Hood, with shrieking spirits or gory hands; but with the consciousness of hopes defeated, and purposes left unaccomplished. Adam Wraysbury might, in his living days, have exchanged its gloomy walls for a palace. Yet he had maundered on, in gloomy obscurity, from day to day; losing sight of the great dial of eternity, and forgetting to turn the golden sands of his own paltry hour-glass, till all that remained to him in possession consisted of a few feet of earth, surrounding a few planks of elm.

Even the objects purporting to rejoice the eye, had become dim and overcrusted, in the house of the professional money-maker. The broken panes of glass in an old-fashioned green-house, opening from his sitting-room, had been unrepaired for years; so that not only had the birds of the air made it their refuge, but the rain had formed little tanks in the uneven brick flooring, in which to stagnate and grow fetid; engendering a foul atmosphere, whose dampness kept alive two or three spindled plants, accidentally left in the place; the unnatural and solitary growth of which appeared a mockery.

Great was the relief to emerge from such a spot into the cheerful, well-ventilated, well-furnished rooms of the Adelphi Hotel; where the rumour already prevalent, that the seedy-looking stranger was sole heir to the enormous fortune of the late Adam Wraysbury, secured him such fare and attendance as would have awaited a prince of the blood.

For though Woolston had enjoined the men of business to keep secret the contents of his kinsman's will, till probate was granted, — his heirship had previously transpired; and as nothing remained to be concealed but the exact cypher of the property, the caution maintained by his solicitors served only to exaggerate his reported wealth. Nearly three millions was the sum vulgarly adduced. The fellow-townsmen of old Adam were in fact as proud of his wealth, as a

provincial paper of some monstrous cabbage or pumpkin "grown within the precincts of their county town."

The rumour, though it rendered the waiters alert, and secured the freshest and greenest of turtle and limes, to one whose scrag of mutton had of late been often rancid, did not lessen the pleasure to which he looked forward in rejoicing the kind hearts at Denny Cross with tidings of his luck. It is true that his pleasant anticipations were overclouded by learning, in his parting interview with Messrs. Wortham and Stock, how Jew-like an advantage the firm were disposed to take of his situation. He even allowed himself to be a little harassed by hearing that considerable peculations were apparent in the household matters and counting-house of the deceased. For, already, the rich man was beginning to say to himself, according to the custom of rich men, that, "vast as was his fortune, he owed it to himself, and those who were to succeed him, not to allow any portion of it to be wasted or despoiled."

Still, though discomposed by the discovery that some hundreds, and even thousands, had been lawlessly abstracted from the amount which, when inscribed upon paper, whether in words or numerals, looked all but fabulous, — he was in far better spirits on quitting the city of docks, than when he hailed, in the distant horizon, its canopy of smoke. He was beginning to feel that the earth was as firm under his

feet now his pockets were full, as when his pockets were empty: and laughed within himself, in spite of the grave faces of his fellow travellers, — each of whom was disfigured by the careworn look peculiar to a monied-man, — while concocting the mode and phrase in which to announce to dear Maria, that henceforth she was to be the rival of duchesses.

Was it the result of a sultry dog-day evening, or that, for some days past, he had been cherishing only gigantic ideas and projects, that the entrance gate at Denny Cross, which necessitated the descent of the Station fly-driver to open it, struck him, for the first time, as sadly in want of a lodge? — And that, on approaching the old manor house, through a paddock in which a very heterogeneous assemblage of quadrupeds were grazing, something of his father's appreciation of a small squire and squiredom, made him wonder at the supineness with which the Penningtons had contented themselves, from age to age, with the mediocrity of their birthright? — But it mattered little. Maria was his, not theirs; and Maria should henceforward revel in those luxuries, which, in his early courtship, he had so longed to lay at her feet.

It mortified him, meanwhile, not a little, that, though he had expressly announced the hour of his arrival, no Maria met him at the paddock gate; no, nor even at the door of the house. But when the cause of her absence was explained, with a sorrowful

countenance, by the kind-hearted Sophy, he would have given worlds that he had been really neglected. For alas! after rising at an untimely hour to see him off on his departure for town, she had been attacked with a relapse of her Ramsgate fever.

The man whose exultation was thus suddenly stricken to the dust, had not courage to inquire whether his wife were actually in danger. But Sophy hastened to add that Mr. Gauntlett, (a chuckle-headed apothecary from the village, who had been long entrusted with the catarrhs and chilblains of the family), considered her illness unimportant; and that, with care, she would "do very well."

"Mr. Gauntlett considered? Why, his wife might as well be consigned to the doctoring of the village vet., as to those of the putty-brained apothecary!" —

Almost before he had heard his sister-in-law to an end, a note was written and dispatched to Northampton, requiring the immediate attendance of Dr. Fermor, the first physician in the county.

Poor Sophy looked aghast. Dr. F. had never been summoned but once, to Denny Cross; when his visit made a sort of epoch in the family; for it was an occasion of the fatal illness of their mother. She hesitated, however, to inquire of her anxious brother-in-law, whether he were provided with the twenty guineas that must be forthcoming for the great physician. Nothing doubting that, in his agitation he had over-

looked this contingency, she determined to make up the money secretly among her brothers and sisters, in order that poor Woolston might not be put to shame.

On entering the sick chamber, the distracted husband felt inclined to back up his express to Northampton by another to London, for medical advice of even higher authority, so ghastly were the cheeks of the sufferer — so heavy her eyes. But he had not been seated ten minutes by the bed-side, before he would fain have recalled even the minor missive. Her looks lighted up, the moment she found her hand in his. His ill-explained absence had alarmed her, and produced her relapse; and her head and heart were suddenly lightened again, on finding him again by her side, with sympathizing tears in his eyes.

Little Netta was now sent for; whose prattle, for two previous days, her mother had been unable to bear. And oh! how poor Woolston longed to whisper to the invalid, that the destinies of both mother and child were secured against all future overcloudings of pecuniary care.

But he dared not. The shock, however pleasant, might be injurious. Even Dr. Fermor, when he eventually made his appearance, desired that his patient might be kept strictly quiet. "Her indisposition was the result of over-tension of the nerves. Nothing but perfect tranquillity would restore her."

However tantalizing, therefore, the momentous

secret must remain fermenting in his bosom! For he would not so greatly wrong Maria and himself, as to allow it to ooze out to the family, before the person entitled to the first disclosure had enjoyed her privilege. He compelled himself, therefore, to turn from his wife's chamber that she might doze unmolested, to listen to the domestic twaddle of the Penningtons, instead of dwelling upon his own gigantic prospects. He heard them discuss the twenty guineas given to the doctor, as though there were not another five-pound-note in the world. But why so impatient with the narrowness of their calculations? To himself, only a week before, the outlay would have appeared twice as ruinous!

But no sooner was he re-assured concerning Mrs. Woolston's condition, than worldly cares soon resumed their ascendancy. He had undertaken to meet the lawyers in London the following day; and till he was on the spot, nothing could be done. He dispatched letters, indeed, both to Liverpool and London, postponing the meeting, on the plea of serious illness in his family. But he could not help wishing that poor Maria's constitution had not broken down at so very critical a moment.

He thought, perhaps of her inopportune indisposition, as Macbeth of the death of his lady, — that there might have been a "time for it hereafter."

CHAPTER VI.

FORTUNATELY for the new millionary, his wife, like the spouse of John Gilpin, possessed a frugal mind; and her dread lest prolonged sickness should necessitate a second twenty-guinea fee, conspired with the pleasant and cheerful countenance of her husband to produce rapid improvement. The lapse of a few days, therefore, enabled him to disclose so much of the state of his affairs, as that he had inherited from his uncle a considerable fortune, the amount of which was not at present exactly ascertainable; and that he must leave her for a short time to execute certain forms connected with his inheritance.

Under such circumstances, his departure served almost as a restorative; for no small portion of Mrs. Woolston's nervous fever had arisen from the pressure of family difficulties, and the dread of becoming a burden to her family.

The simple-hearted Penningtons, meanwhile, accustomed to measure opulence by their father's comfortable income of fifteen hundred a-year, decided, while gossiping among themselves over Mr. Woolston's communication, that he had perhaps come into four or five thousand per annum; which, combined with the Harrals

property, would hereafter render him one of the richest men in that part of the county.

Yet, notwithstanding this high assessment, they were a little alarmed when, some days after his departure for town, there arrived a box of toys and books for Netta, a cashmere shawl of some value for Netta's mother, and warrants for a couple of pipes of wine for Netta's grandpapa. They prayed heaven that dear John might not be already becoming a spendthrift; and scarcely liked to accept such costly gifts.

The moneyed man, meanwhile, was pre-occupied by very different solicitudes.

"Will you believe it, my dear Farmer," said he, to the friend to whom he rushed, on arriving in town, to express both his happiness and gratitude, — "will you believe that my sisters and brothers-in-law, who had long flung me aside like a last year's almanack, have already begun to overwhelm me with attentions?"

"Of course they have. You did not surely expect to succeed to millions of money without the usual tax of hangers-on, who will beset you as a sugar-cask is infested by flies?"

"I did not expect my own flesh and blood to betray such shabbiness."

"Not when forewarned by their having turned their backs on you in your adversity?"

"Men like Molyneux and Harpsden should want

courage to exhibit such bare-faced meanness. Their letters of congratulation are positively as servile as those addressed by a mandarin of the first button to the cousin of the sun and moon! — The parson places himself at my feet. — The Honourable, which is still more offensive, affects to treat me as now, for the first time, on his level."

"And that very loose fish, Wroughton?"

"Is abroad, and has not yet heard of my sudden Crœsus-ship, which the London papers learned from the Liverpool press. Yet I did everything in my power, when on the spot, to stifle the report."

"But *why* stifle it or affix so much importance to its results? These little ebullitions of human weakness should serve to amuse you."

"Not while I bear in memory that a fifty-pound note vouchsafed by one of my sisters, might have afforded means to preserve the life of my poor boy!"

"But did you apply to them? — or did your frowardness estrange you from *them*, as from myself? — Before all things, my dear Woolston, let us be just. The pride of poverty is almost as paltry a weakness as purse-pride: and in that respect, who shall bear you blameless? Take the advice of an old epicurean. Let by-gones be by-gones. Make the best of those connected with you, both great and small. Do not render uneasy a pathway paved, by the favour of pro-

vidence, with gold and marble, by sowing thorns in the interstices."

John Woolston felt rebuked. But he endeavoured to defend himself by muttering something about "conscience-sake," and the "impossibility of reconciling earnestness of purpose with flexibility of principle. He could not for mere expediency pretend to be insensible to the insults offered to his wife."

"You will know better by and by, my dear John," said Farmer, patting him on the shoulder with a provoking air of superiority. "Time will teach you that it is scarcely worth while to add to the inevitable evils of this world, by stings and bitternesses, as vexatious to those who inflict, as to those who suffer them. Peace and peace of mind are better things than all the retaliation in the world."

But on this point, his former pupil chose to think for himself; and when Mrs. Woolston was sufficiently recovered to take possession of the apartments he had engaged for her at the Clarendon Hotel, with the kind Sophy as her companion, his only prohibition regarded visits from his family.

Maria was a little inclined to remonstrate: for in her father's house, divisions in families were accounted sinful. Shy as she was, moreover, and enfeebled by recent illness, she felt that the support of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux, would, in the bewildering world

she was about to enter, prove an incalculable advantage.

But her husband had now little leisure for domestic discussions. His time was bespoken by a pressure of business such as he had never fancied could devolve upon any other shoulders than those of a Chancellor of the Exchequer; and he was beginning to find the intrusions of his men of business quite as troublesome as he had ever found it to supervise the business of other people. If a little careless concerning the opinions and occupations of his wife, he probably fancied the consciousness of opulence a sufficient enjoyment.

As if that crowded metropolis were not to *her* as dreary as the desert! — As if, still mourning and still *in* mourning for the boy so fondly loved, she could find pleasure in gaudy shops, or crowded parks! —

One day, having dispatched Janetta and her aunt in the carriage to Kensington Gardens, to enjoy their daily exercise, poor Mrs. Woolston, while reclining despondingly on the sofa, began to tax herself, as with a crime, with the weariness of spirit that overwhelmed her. "Bored" was a word prohibited in the vocabulary of Denny Cross; the good old squire asserting that the state of feeling it announced was an offence against the Almighty, who has created so glorious a world for the enjoyment of the human race.

While she was still searching in her not very capacious mind for a synonym that described the lassi-

tude of heart and soul arising from her recent trials and her strange displacement in life, the head waiter threw open the door, with an announcement which the rumbling of passing carriages rendered unintelligible; and a rather handsome and very fashionably-attired woman advanced eagerly towards her.

Mrs. Woolston was thoroughly embarrassed; for she felt that it could be only one of her husband's sisters who ventured to address her as "Maria." Her visitor was doubtless Mrs. Molyneux. Yet in the self-possessed lady before her, there was as little of the somewhat hoydenish baronet's daughter of the Northampton balls, as of the Squire of Denny Cross's rosy daughter, in her pale and low-voiced self.

"That poor John should have thrown himself away on such an insignificant little dowdy!" was her sister-in-law's mental comment, after they had exchanged greetings.

"What a showy, bold-looking person, to be the daughter of poor old quiet Lady Woolston!" was, on the other hand, Maria's view of the case. And awkward and stammering became her assurances of regret that her husband was not at home to inaugurate their acquaintance.

"I did not come to see my brother. I came to see *you*, and scold you, and *you* only, for having been so long in town without apprising us," replied Mrs. Molyneux, with fluent assurance. "When you were estab-

lished at Edmonton," she continued, (never having exactly realised to herself the locality of her brother's suburban retreat, which Gerald Molyneux comprised under the generic name of "back slums,") — "it was impossible for poor people like ourselves, possessing only one miserable attempt at a brougham-horse, to drive so far as a stage out of town. But on settling near us, you ought really to have let me know where you were to be found. It is by mere accident that I discovered you."

Maria, veracity itself, answered what was seldom uttered in that lofty apartment — the exact truth. "Mr. Woolston was much hurt that you had taken so little trouble to find us out in our troubles. As you did not even write to condole with him on the death of his poor little boy, he did not wish just now to recall himself to your recollection."

"So like John! — John was always so touchy — always the oddest creature in the world," said the unabashed visitor, settling her numerous bracelets. "Why, I might as well pretend to be offended that he did not condescend to communicate to *us* the good fortune that has befallen him. I know nothing of it, except through the newspapers. Not a very affectionate mode of correspondence! However, I have overlooked *that*," — she continued, with a smile of forbearance. "As far as Gerald and myself are concerned, we are anxious that there should be an end to all family disunion;

and I have little doubt that, at our instigation, a general reconciliation might be managed. It is time that my brother should resume his natural position at Harrals."

"So I have long thought," said the astonished Maria. "But now, I confess I almost despair. My husband feels deeply hurt, — deeply injured, — and has lost all desire for the reunion to which we once looked fondly forward."

"At all events, you will not refuse your good offices towards promoting it," said Mrs. Molyneux, a little surprised at finding the broken reed possess more pith than she had anticipated. "Blessed, we are told, are the peace-makers. And if you and I, my dear Maria, set about establishing a general pacification, depend upon it, we succeed. The world will think us all the wiser; and *we*, I hope, shall feel the happier."

Her "dear Maria" sighed heavily. She was beginning to doubt whether any thing would make her happier. The tardy condescensions of Harrals would scarcely suffice to warm up her disconsolate heart.

"And where is my little niece?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux, glancing round the vast half-furnished room, as if she expected to find her hid behind a chiffonnière, or ensconced in a china vase. "I am dying to see her. I have a boy four years older, and a little girl six months younger. Janetta must come and spend a day with her cousins."

Mrs. Woolston, who, till this proposal, had been rather irritated by her fine-lady sister-in-law's officious patronage, melted at the sound of her little daughter's name, pronounced for the first time by one of her nearest of kin. She had not fancied that it was even known to the cold-hearted Woolston family.

"Netta is gone to take a drive with my sister. I should like you to have seen her. She is thought quite a Woolston!" said she, more graciously.

"So much the worse for her, for we have no pretensions to hereditary beauty. But Gerald, who caught a glimpse of her yesterday in your carriage, as we were setting down John at the Alfred, told me she was as fair as daylight, which, you know, is distinctively a Pennington characteristic."

Till that moment, Maria had never fancied that the Penningtons possessed characteristics. No one had ever done poor Denny Cross the honour to suppose so. But she was inexpressibly pleased that Mr. Molyneux should have remarked the waxen complexion and flaxen locks of her pretty little girl.

"She will be four years old in a week or two," added Mrs. Molyneux, to the increasing surprise of her sister-in-law, to whose artless mind it never occurred that Emma and her husband had been studying the baronetage preparatory to the visit, and were well up in family dates.

"Yes, four years old in a fortnight," she replied,

much gratified. "John was saying to me this morning, that we ought to be looking out for a nursery governess for her. But I hardly know where they are to be found."

"I know of the very person to suit you," exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux, with suddenly-kindled animation. "A clergyman's orphan daughter in reduced circumstances, brought up in one of our best educational institutions, under the patronage of my mother-in-law, Lady Dinton. She obtained, on leaving it, a situation in a nobleman's family; but the little girl of whom she had the care, a charming child — an only child — was carried off, a few months ago, by a fever."

Mrs. Woolston's sympathies were instantly enlisted. She began to question and cross-question her sister-in-law, not respecting the governess, but the child; its age, its symptoms, its sorrowing parents; and by details sufficiently melancholy, Mrs. Molyneux unconsciously effected the conquest of her heart.

Before they parted, it was settled that Emma should make all necessary inquiries concerning the salary and pretensions of the incomparable Miss Avesford; and that, her father permitting, Janetta should dine with her cousins the following day.

Poor child! — She had yet to learn that already, as an heiress in perspective, she was condemned to the *peine forte et dure* of a Patent Governess! —

CHAPTER VII.

On Sophy Pennington's return from her drive, though pleased to find her sister's cheek flushed and her eyes glistening with emotion, she could not help intimating her fears that Mr. Woolston would resist the engagement formed for his little girl. For Sophy argued on such insufficient grounds as principle and consistency; and little knew what trivial inducements suffice to render people of the world untrue to their code of morality. John Woolston arrived at home to dinner still more flushed than his wife, in the best of temper and spirits. After a long morning's wrangle with his men of business, he had succeeded in proving himself entitled to a sum of seventeen thousand pounds in railway stock, beyond what they had carried to his credit; and small as was this amount compared with the enormous bulk of his newly-acquired wealth, yet, as having been made out by his unassisted perspicacity, he seemed to value it more than all the rest of his property.

When, in the course of dinner, Maria, with fear and trembling, alluded to his sister's visit, it was with the utmost difficulty she could get him to listen. Instead of bursting into angry reprehension, as predicted by

Sophy, he kept smiling to himself, like Malvolio; thinking far more of his railway stock than of Gerald Molyneux, or all his tribe.

But when she proceeded to state that a governess for Netta was about to be secured for them by his sister, he inclined his ear to listen. *That* was too serious a consideration to be trifled with. A clergyman's daughter in reduced circumstances, turned adrift by the death of her pupil, sounded pleasantly enough. But the Molyneuxes, both husband and wife, were general-dealers in plausibilities. And though too much in charity just then with himself and all the world, to harass his wife by opposing so small an advance towards a family reconciliation as was to be made by allowing his little girl to eat her roast mutton and rice-pudding in Wilton Place, he bargained, in return for the concession, that Maria would not commit herself as regarded an engagement with Miss Avesford.

The Gerald Molyneuxes were a couple of no rare occurrence among the brilliant triflers of the day; though they might have found better acceptance in society a quarter of a century ago. After undergoing as much flogging, boating, and cricketing at Eton as was due to the second son of an English earl, Gerald Molyneux had been prepared at Sandhurst for the commission already waiting for him in the Guards. Remarkably good-looking, his ingrained selfishness was fostered by the attentions showered on him upon

his entrance into the fashionable world, where a liberal allowance rendered his life a pleasant one; and but that, at a Hunt-ball, one snowy Christmas, at which, his lady-mother being patroness, he was obliged to exhibit the light of his countenance, he had allowed his fancy to be captivated by the fair face of the eldest daughter of Sir Harry Woolston, he would probably have gone on mounting guard through a score of London seasons, till he attained that fossil condition which, in time of peace, characterizes the higher grade of household epaulets.

In a London ball-room, he would have seen her without peril. But viewed in all the distinction of her debût in a country ball-room, where, his own two sisters being still unpresented, she was the heroine of the night, his heart was slightly singed. A few days at Harrals, where both the stable and billiard-table were unexceptionable, completed his conquest; and during a long and perilous sledge-drive with the gay guardsman, the thoughtless Emma pledged herself to become, under sanction of the parental authorities, the wife of a poor Honourable.

If not absolutely withheld, their consent was grudgingly conceded. On the score of family, neither father could object; and if the young couple could make up their minds to live on a thousand a-year, (six hundred given by Lord Dinton and three by Sir Harry, were, by tacit consent, called a thousand), it

was their own affair. And thus, a boy of three-and-twenty and a girl of eighteen, were launched in a pleasure-boat on the stormy ocean of life, with shipwreck staring them in the face.

Had they settled quietly in the country, in a neighbourhood where the high position of their respective families would have established their own, without striving or struggling to appear richer or greater than they were, their means might have sufficed them. But Gerald, for whom a life of pleasure had far more charm than a life of happiness, pleaded professional necessity for a house in London. And though, for a time, it was of the smallest, unconscious self-indulgence rendered it as costly as a palace. Handsome, lively, agreeable both to look at and listen to, they were invited every where; and thus universally welcome, appeared to take life and its cares as an excellent joke.

When the birth of a second child rendered their little toy-box of a house too small to hold them, while the agglomerated bills of four years rendered London itself too *hot* to hold them, the sale of Gerald's commission and the generous assistance of his father so far enfranchised them, that a small country-house might once more have secured their well-being. But both Gerald and the wife whom he had by this time trained to his own views of domestic felicity, shuddered at the idea of what they were pleased to term,

a penal settlement. Protesting that, on the continent, their income of *vingt cinq mille francs de rentes* would place every luxury within their reach, they accordingly established themselves at Paris; — where six pleasant months exhausted their year's income.

A lucky, or rather *un*lucky *coup* at play kept them going for a time; and enabled Emma to perfect herself in the art of dress and other superficial accomplishments, no where so readily acquired as in the atmosphere of the Faubourg St. Honoré. But the moment Fortunatus's purse was exhausted, he discovered that, with empty pockets, a metropolis which comprehends every earthly delight and enjoyment, save that of credit, was far harder to live in than the more sober-suited capital of his native land; where his father's son commanded a most unjustifiable margin of trust.

They returned to England, therefore, to quarter themselves and their ennui, throughout the winter, at Molyneux Castle; and cajole from Lord Dinton the means of spending a brilliant season in one of the little ready-furnished caskets of Belgravia. Their beautiful children were the pets of the neighbouring square, and of their aunts Lady Mary and Lady Jemima; and Mrs. Woolston when, the following day, she fulfilled her engagement of introducing little Netta to her cousins, felt inexpressibly mortified by the contrast afforded by the poor shy child in her black frock,

to the noisy boy and flighty girl, whose gay but becoming costumes savoured more of the masquerade than of the nursery.

Happy and impetuous, the little Molyneuxes seized upon their timid little cousin, rather as a victim than a playmate; and Maria, who saw her colour rise and her breath come short, so little was she accustomed to the rough companionship customary to her age, was sadly afraid that a burst of tears would crown the introduction.

But poor little Netta was too much frightened to cry. She submitted heroically to have her bonnet torn off, and to be dragged by Edgar and Theodosia to their playroom; and poor Maria dared not express her wish to accompany them, for the protection of the frightened child. But on finding herself *tête-à-tête* with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux's pleasant manners and cheerful voice soon obliterated her anxieties. As a mere acquaintance, Emma was as agreeable as is usually the case with people of whom tact is the leading characteristic. Had she married Mr. Harpsden, the Curate of Harrals, — so disastrously matched with her sister, an invalid in body and mind, — her energies of nature would, perhaps, have converted her into an active parson's wife. At all events, had her own rash marriage been delayed, the routine of respectability maintained at Harrals would have imparted some consistency to her volatile mind. As it was, she had

married at eighteen, before her principles were formed; and, under the influence of Gerald Molyneux, had degenerated into an inferior being; — one of those glittering molecules developed by a factitious order of society.

Her husband had enjoined her to spare no pains to conciliate the wife of the brother, whose miraculous affluence had suddenly become the talk and marvel of the day; and it was no small comfort to find the rustic sister-in-law she was required to take to her heart, as free from vulgarity as guile. Maria satisfied her prying questions with the artlessness of a child.

"It is really unlucky," observed Emma carelessly, "that your mourning, and the lateness of your arrival in town, will prevent your being presented at court this season."

"Presented at court?" repeated Mrs. Woolston, uncertain whether she had heard rightly.

"When settled in town, you will find it indispensable. — My mother-in-law, Lady Dinton, will, I am sure, be delighted to present you." —

"I hope that John will make up his mind to reside in the country," rejoined Maria.

"Of course. Every body resides in the country, when the London season is over. And pray who supplies your diamonds? — For John must really give you some. My mother's, though good enough for the

wife of a country baronet, are quite unequal to your present splendid fortune."

"I have never even thought of it," replied Maria, a little shocked by the hardness of her tone. "I often wonder why people care so much for jewels."

"Because you have not moved in the sphere to which they are appropriate. — You will learn to prize them in time. — Have them, you *must*." —

Mrs. Woolston was beginning to think these numerous "*musts*," — this indispensable house in town and suit of brilliants, — a sad and singular drawback on wealth and independence. Again, she expressed a hope that John would be induced to settle in the country.

"He is about to purchase a place, then? — Or did old Wraysbury leave estates on which he can build?" —

"I have never inquired. My husband is so harassed with business of all kinds, that I do not trouble him with superfluous questions."

Mrs. Molyneux had hardly supposed that such supine stupidity as that of her new sister, could be incarnate in female nature. —

"Just now," added Maria, finding that she did not reply, — "he is occupied at the College of Arms, about the registration of our change of name."

It was now the turn of Mrs. Molyneux to reiterate — "*Change* of name? — *What* change?"

"I should have said addition to our name. By his uncle's will, my husband is required to adopt that of Wraysbury."

"Of Wraysbury? — Of an all but shopkeeper?" —

"Such were the old gentleman's conditions. And few people would grumble at them, when accompanied by a legacy of more than a million and a half of money."

Mrs. Molyneux sat dumb and motionless. It was her first intimation of the enormous amount of her brother's inheritance. It was her first certification of the shabbiness of her own legacy.

"My brother may not grumble at them," said she, unwilling to betray the origin of her disturbance. "But what will be my father's feelings? — Such an insult to the Woolstons of Harrals! — The old title to be merged in the obscure name of a Liverpool drysalter!"

"If we should never have another son," said Maria, timidly, "I understand that the title and estate of Harrals devolve upon some distant cousin of Sir Harry?" —

"Yes, — the Wiltshire Woolstons. But you will have dozens of sons!"

"Even, in that case," rejoined her sister-in-law, smiling at her prediction, "the family title would remain uninjured. The Wraysbury estate and name

descend only to a second son: or failing one, to our eldest daughter."

"To Janetta? — Little Netta actually heiress to nearly seventy thousand a year? — I bespeak her for Edgar!" cried Mrs. Molyneux, resuming her previous levity. "I adopt her from this moment as a daughter-in-law!" —

"But since her poor husband would have to assume the name of the Liverpool drysalter?" was Maria's *almost* arch reply.

"Oh! *we*, you know, are spendthrifts and beggars, and would do it for half the money. Nor are either the prèsent or the next Lord Dinton at all bigoted to their emblazonments. It is only country baronets, like my poor father, who hang up their pedigree in their hall, and worship their own consequence. But we must try to reconcile him, my dear Maria, to the idea of a Mr. and Mrs. Woolston Wraysbury. Meanwhile, let us go and rescue the little heiress, my future daughter-in-law, from being killed with kindness by her cousins!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a great triumph for the new man of millions when his old friend, Farmer, was, after much persuasion, induced one day at the close of the season, to forego for once Mrs. Dalgairns and her pepperpot, and traverse the few hundred yards intervening between the Albany and the Clarendon, to dine with "Mr. and Mrs. Woolston Wraysbury." The hotel had been selected for his domicile, in the hope that such occurrences might have been more frequent. But even on this solitary occasion, Farmer had ceded to his entreaties only from a desire to see something of the womankind who were likely to influence the future career of his friend. No one understood better than the old bachelor, that, actively or passively, the women of a house assign its tone and colouring; a consideration, which had, perhaps, been the means of keeping him single.

It was strictly a family dinner; little Netta appearing with the strawberries, and at a slight signal from her father, disappearing again with her mother and aunt so shortly afterwards, as to cause a very agreeable surprise to the guest.

"That little creature is not yet spoiled, I see," he

observed, when the door closed after them. "If she should hereafter become wilful, it will be the fault of those about her. I never saw a gentler child."

"Netta is more than gentle — she is feeble and subdued," replied his friend. "The nursery quietude required by her brother's infirmities repressed the natural elasticity of childhood. We are none of us very lively people. Even Sophy Pennington, at twenty, has more the character of a matron than of a girl. However, we shall all be freshened up shortly. Sir Pottifer Hampson has prescribed Marienbad for my wife; and as even my lawyers have asked for a respite during the next blank month or two, we start for the continent on Monday next."

A sarcastic smile played on the lips of old Farmer. "Already Marienbad and Sir Pottifer!" he muttered, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Your wife would have done wonderfully well without Marienbad, my dear John, had her name remained Woolston instead of Wraysbury; particularly when you have so many calls and claims, just now, to detain you in England."

"On the contrary, all the urgent part of my business is transacted."

"What do you call the urgent part?"

"All in which my personal investigation and signature is indispensable. The trustees named by old Adam are now, to a certain degree, in charge of the property."

"But surely you acknowledge duties unconnected with these mercenary interests?"

"You would scarcely, my dear Farmer, have me hurry, at a moment's notice, into political life, — especially with my hands already overburthened with private business?"

"I was not thinking of politics. I was not thinking of public life."

"What, then, would you have me do?"

"Arise and go to your father. He is at a precarious time of life. You must not let him slip out of the world, John, without having taken you by the hand."

"His health is much the same as usual. Maria heard good accounts of him the other day, from one of my sisters."

"You are now in a position," resumed Farmer, "to come forward and solicit a reconciliation, without incurring the imputation of interested motives. Even your pride has its salvo. Take my advice, and before you trouble your head about German baths, carry your wife and child straight down to Harrals. Sir Harry has never seen the little girl."

"Nor ever expressed the slightest wish to see her. — No, no. — Time enough to go through the vexation of such an interview when I can show him a son and heir, and ask his blessing for the future Woolston of Harrals."

"The son and heir may never make its ap-

pearance; and, as I said before, your father's life is precarious."

"At all events," retorted Mr. Wraysbury, "I shall not make an attempt that would entail a thousand stormy recriminations, at a moment when Maria is not in a state of health to confront unusual excitement. I shall be absent only for a few weeks — at the utmost, a couple of months. On my return, I will see about complying with your suggestion."

"The delay of a few days, for the purpose of visiting Northamptonshire previous to your departure, would surely be of no great moment."

"So little, that we are actually going to Denny Cross to leave my little girl with her grand-father. We do not wish to expose the child to the fatigues and hazards of a long journey, this hot weather."

"You seem kinder to *her* than to yourselves. But it is true, children are sad nuisances in travelling," added Farmer, with another sarcastic smile. — "Does Miss Pennington accompany you?" —

"Maria, in her delicate state, can ill afford to dispense with her company. But Richard Pennington, a narrow-minded squire of the old school, has a horror of what he calls 'forren parts.' Even Sophy is little disposed for the tour. She would prefer remaining at home to take care of her little niece. However, some sacrifice is due to her sister. And I shall never be

able to reconcile Maria to the expedition, unless I secure her company."

"Your wife, then, is not the instigator of this German bath expedition? I was afraid it had arisen from the fashionable Hygienoculture, which appears to be one of the manias of the day."

"You have formed a very mistaken idea of the Penningtons," said Wraysbury, laughing heartily at the supposition, "if you suppose any one of them likely to be fashion-bitten. The most plain-dealing matter-of-fact people in the world!" —

"A sensible family! — Let us drink their health," rejoined Farmer, gravely. "I am beginning to think, John, that your father may have been in the wrong. But *that* is no reason why, at eighty and a bittock, he should not have his pardon begged by a rebellious son."

"Still, you must admit," said Wraysbury, replying to the former clause of his speech the better to overlook the latter, "that my wife must now learn to enlarge her sphere of social enjoyments?"

"If you leave it to *her* to define what she understands by the word enjoyment. So much of that sort of thing is relative to our individual health, strength, and circumstances. I remember (excuse me for recalling it to your mind), the only time you dined with me in the Albany, your gazing round my chambers as we sat *tête-à-tête* over our wine, and observing that

your notion of human happiness extended no further than my position in life; — as comprising competence, peace of mind and body, and literary leisure."

John Wraysbury smiled. — He remembered it well. But he also remembered the vortex of domestic anxieties from which he had emerged, to enjoy the feast of reason and pepperpot, and flow of soul and Léoville, afforded him by his learned friend.

"You added," said Farmer, unconsciously forming on the table-cloth a dissected map of devilled biscuit, "that, could you command your time and purse, your utmost desire was to live as I did. But I told you then, my dear fellow, with my usual uncivil frankness, that for such a life you were unfitted; that *I* was a self-made man, with few friends and only distant relatives, and free from all family ties upon my time. In short, that my egotism was privileged. Whereas, *you* owed, and still owe yourself to your country and your county, your parents and your children; — with real property to tax your attention, and a definite position in society, to whose duties you are harnessed."

Wraysbury bowed and smiled, but of all this remembered nothing. The avalanche of wealth which had fallen upon him in the interim, had crushed the corner-cupboard wisdom of his prosy friend out of his memory.

"But this was not all I ventured to say," continued Farmer, fancying, from the silence of his companion,

that he was making an impression. "I told you that you had neither the moderation of mind nor phlegmatic habit of body, in which I rejoice, to enable you to content yourself with a life of rumination and reverie. And though you denied it then, and with some vehemence, you will probably admit by this time that you would as soon be an old cow moping over a hedge, as Roger Farmer in his solitary chambers."

Though far from of a jocular turn, Wraysbury laughed outright; so justly had the old lawyer interpreted what was passing in his thoughts.

"And this proves," resumed his guest, coming at length to his moral, "that, like most other people, you are the slave of circumstances, not the master of your opinions. But if yours have changed, my dear Wraysbury, as regards the comparative satisfaction of lounging away the afternoon in one's easy chair, or by one's fireside, with the last new work of merit on one's reading-desk, and a wholesome dinner and sound wine in prospect, — and galloping over a bad road harnessed by straw-tied ropes to four cart-horses, at the will and pleasure of a belaced courier, prepared to pick your pocket or cut your throat, as occasion serves, — in order to imbibe nauseous draughts which you could obtain quite as nasty and efficacious at the nearest apothecary's —" Again, Wraysbury interrupted him by a hearty laugh; which ceased, however, when Roger Farmer quietly added, — "why not also re-

nounce your obstinacy and obduracy as regards Sir Harry Woolston?" —

"Why not, indeed!" — retorted his host, "except that I am, as you imply, a huffy, obstinate brute! Let us hope, however, that among the cures about to be operated in the family by the Marienbad waters, may be that of my taste and temper."

He then, though the claret pitcher remained three parts full, proposed joining the ladies; a suggestion which, as he anticipated, had the effect of deciding Roger Farmer to ask for his hat and great coat. "He had business that necessitated his being at home early."

But though Wraysbury had turned so deaf an ear to the counsels of his old master, they had found some kind of secret channel to his heart. Though pride, the master-passion, prevented his adopting the advice so officiously offered, it rang in his ears throughout his hurried journey to Denny Cross.

"You will probably repent when it is too late," had been Farmer's parting words to his former pupil. "How will you presume, hereafter, to inculcate in your daughter the virtue of filial duty, when she has discovered how little of the pious Æneas was exhibited by her father!"

The lesson touched him still more nearly, when he saw how instinctively his right-thinking wife renounced her claim to the companionship of her sister in her impending tour, the moment Mr. Pennington expressed

a wish for Sophia to remain in England, in charge of his little granddaughter.

"Impossible to accomplish a meeting with my father and mother at a moment's notice," mused he, while Maria was taking a tearful leave of her family, and dared not trust herself to take leave of her child. "But the moment I return to England, I will see how it can be managed with least emotion to the old gentleman, and least mortification to myself."

Rich or poor, he seemed determined to accredit Roger Farmer's accusation of wanting the decision and promptitude of mind, enabling a man to do the right thing at the right moment, which is one of the indispensable attributes of genius. No time or plan could, in fact, be more propitious to a reconciliation between himself and the old baronet, than the moment when scarcely twenty miles divided them; and the three sons-in-law who had so largely assisted to maintain Sir Harry's resentments, were too busy in appropriating to their necessities old Adam Wraysbury's trifling legacy, to take the smallest heed of Harrals. The fort was unguarded. He had only to step in with a flag of truce in his hand, either singly, or with his wife and child, and a general peace would have been concluded.

Next day, when bowling along the Dover road, in company with the gentle, silent woman, who, with moistened eyes and her veil down to conceal them, reclined in the corner of the carriage, wondering whether

her darling Netta were enjoying the cheerful old nursery at Denny Cross, as much as she herself had done in days of yore, he already regretted that he had not obeyed the impulse of which he had been conscious ere he quitted Northamptonshire; — to ride over to Harrals, and, even if not admitted to an interview with his father, to consult old Wardlaw and the aged housekeeper, Sir Harry's contemporary, concerning the state of his health, spirits, and feelings. But even as, four years before, he had declared it to be too late for pacific overtures, he now declared it to be too early: and again glanced at the possibility of a male heir, or male heirs, to reconcile the house of Harrals to the name of Wraysbury.

The Channel once crossed, he ceased to think of the subject at all. A total change of scenery and personages exercised its usual happy influence. Half the salutary results of travel, especially of foreign travel, are chiefly referrible to this exorcism of domestic spectres.

It was something to a man of late so overharassed by business, to find the care of himself and his wife thoroughly taken out of his own hands by the belaced courier denounced by Roger Farmer; who, on finding that his *Herrschaft* were guiltless of foreign languages, and not very voluble in their own, — mere *nouveaux riches*, whose passport did not entitle him to inscribe them in the arrival lists of the hotels as so much, or

rather so little, as "milor" and "milédi," — began to treat them as children, and instruct them "what to eat, drink, and avoid;" — leaving them little more liberty of action than is assigned to lunatics, crowned heads, and other irresponsible persons.

CHAPTER IX.

"But you do not mean," observed old Lady Dinton to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Molyneux, who at the close of the summer usually took down her children to grass at Molyneux Castle, while her husband enjoyed himself on the Moors, — "You surely do not mean, my dear Emma, that your brother has gone abroad without reconciling himself to his parents?"

"He is gone only to the German Baths; for which the season is so short, that delay was impossible."

"Impossible? — With such an object to be accomplished?"

"My brother's first object, just now, is the health of his wife. It is everything to them, that a healthy boy should replace the one they lost last spring. — Harrals is entailed on heirs male."

"Yes, — as I have heard your husband very unreasonably complain."

"Even the splendid fortune lately inherited by my brother, can only descend to his little girl, or a second son. It will otherwise fall into the hands of some Wraysbury cousin."

It was not of *this* the worthy old Countess was thinking. — She was shocked at so wilful a perpetua-

tion of the family feud. For the Dintons were wholesome, simple-minded people. The conduct and principles of their son Gerald had more than once startled and shocked them. But over his elders it could not, of course, exercise the same demoralizing influence as over his wife. They did not understand his slang, they did not sanction his habits; aud anxious, indeed, would Emma have been, had half his offences and imprudencies been likely to reach the ears of the Earl and Countess. Her children, docked of half their finery, were kept in some degree of order, while sojourning at the Castle; — and in order to excuse her repugnance to visit her own people and her father's house, she assured her grave mother-in-law that the intelligence which had reached her ladyship of Sir Harry Woolston's increased illness and infirmities, was mere country gossip and exaggeration.

"Gerald proposes to accompany us there in October, on his return from the Highlands," said she, without adverting to the excellent covert-shooting, which would just then impart a charm even to Harrals. "By that time, my brother and his wife will perhaps have been invited to join the family party."

"I am vastly glad to hear it, my dear. The reunion cannot take place too soon," rejoined Lady Dinton, credulously. "Nothing appears to me more unaccountable than family estrangement among persons of

birth and education, who owe an example to the inferior classes."

This was, in fact, somewhat too much the code of Dinton morality. The Countess considered herself a flugelwoman set up to regulate the morals of the county, of which her father and husband had been successively lords lieutenant; and her daughters would not have undergone half the Berlin work and syntax with which their girlhood had been smothered, but that the Countess held it a duty to keep them a language and a yard or two of canvas ahead of the most accomplished young lady of the shire. She fancied that unless Lady Jemima and Lady Mary had wrought in curious tent-stitch the great ottoman in the green drawing-room at Molyneux Castle, little Miss Titmouse at the Parsonage might never have undertaken her hassocks; the pride of the parish-church.

But this was Lady Dinton's only weakness. She was a kindly-natured woman, thinking and speaking no guile; and wanted all the world to be as blameless and painstaking as herself. Sprung from one of those blue-blood lines of English aristocracy, concerning the existence of which foreigners are as incredulous as though, till the days of the Stuarts, the Anglo-Saxons were a race of slopsellers, and their little island one vast counter, — the Countess discerned less distinction between Harrals and Denny Cross, than was perceptible to their owners. Sir Harry Woolston, indeed,

had in some degree, forfeited caste, in their eyes, by intermarrying with Liverpool; whereas, the late Mrs. Pennington was daughter to a well-born Colonel of Dragoons. And though Richard Pennington, the occupation of whose life, when not busy with his farm, consisted of drumming slightly with his knuckles on the nearest article of furniture, as an accompaniment to a perpetual humming of what he conceived to be tunes, (a curious medley of Hearts of Oak, Christmas anthems, and the British Grenadiers,) was as unpolished as his own boots, the surly baronet of Harrals was almost as desultory in his dialogue as the good-humoured squire in his melodies. — In real humanity of nature, the latter was many cubits nearer the sky.

But upon the comparative merits of the offspring of both their houses, Lady Dinton, accustomed to seek peace and ensue it, did not, her son having married into the Woolston family, permit herself to pronounce judgment.

She could scarcely bring herself, indeed, to sympathise in Gerald's angry lamentations at being so shabbily treated in Adam Wraysbury's will. The old man's prodigious fortune, she understood, had been amassed in a grovelling manner, in petty trade; and though, like the fertile vine in the palace garden at Hampton Court, the fruit displayed no token of its unsavoury origin, Lady Dinton, whose well-regulated life and fortune had never acquainted her with the

want of a five-pound note, was secretly of opinion, that her daughter-in-law's brother would have held a more respectable position as Woolston of Harrals, with eight thousand a-year in land held by the family for the last four centuries, than as Wraysbury of Nomansland, with seventy thousand. To *her*, the factitious and whimsical wants of Belgravia, and the avidity which they create, were unknown.

Though accustomed to accept the catastrophes of life with passive philosophy, she was keen enough, when a principle was to be carried out or a duty discharged; and conscious how deeply it would grieve her if Lady Mary or Lady Jemima were capable of enjoying their breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, with the lively appetite exhibited by Mrs. Gerald, when she or Lord Dinton were pronounced to be in a precarious state, she could not help occasionally reminding Emma, that an absence of four-and-twenty hours from her children, would enable her to visit Harrals, and secure what might be a last interview with poor old Sir Harry.

But Mrs. Molyneux assured her that such a visit would be rather an annoyance to her parents than a satisfaction; that they had their own hours and habits, which must not be invaded; and that her brother-in-law, Mr. Harpsden, who resided at the Rectory, within a few hundred yards of the house, would look with a

jealous eye on her unauthorized arrival. — "Time enough, on Gerald's return."

It was, however, some weeks before her husband's return, that a letter was one day placed in her hands, brought over by express from Harrals; requesting her immediate attendance on her mother, who since the sudden death of Sir Harry Woolston, the preceding night, had been in a speechless condition. A hurried departure was, of course, instantly prepared for. But Lady Dinton's surprise was far greater than she chose to express, at hearing her daughter-in-law inveigh against the barbarity and neglect of the Harpsdens, in having failed to apprise her in time of her father's condition. She was too good a Christian to say, "My dear, I warned you;" too forbearing to observe that the instincts 'of filial affection ought to have rendered warning superfluous.

Arrived at Harrals, Mrs. Molyneux found that her presence was indeed indispensable. Lady Woolston was in a state of either catalepsy or paralysis. From the moment she was aware of her husband's death, she had become unconscious of anything else. For forty years long, this most submissive of wives had never been known to exercise a will of her own; and now that the ruling influence was withdrawn, the very life-springs within her seemed to be broken. She lay with her eyes closed, in a half-torpid condition; nearly as much a corpse as the body in an adjoining cham-

ber, of which the undertakers had already taken possession.

"But my sister; — why is not my sister here?" — inquired Mrs. Molyneux, when Harpsden, with an air of sanctimonious depression, acquainted her with the instantaneous nature of Sir Harry's fatal seizure while the paper brought by the second post was being read aloud to him by his wife.

"Poor Carry is confined to her room. Poor Carry is, as usual, suffering from her autumnal ague. It would be death to her to leave the house," replied the plausible rector. "But it is rather hard upon me, at so trying a moment, to have so many responsibilities thrown on my shoulders; the Wraysburys and Wroughtons on the continent — Molyneux in the Highlands, — my wife disabled, — no one but myself to issue orders. Now you have come, Emma, you must at least relieve me from the charge of your mother."

"I have not been slow to obey your summons," replied Mrs. Molyneux, coldly; "and had you signified to me, before, that my presence would be acceptable, I should probably have been present at my poor father's last moments."

"Sir Harry did not wish to be disturbed. He avoided as much as possible all allusion to his family."

"Still, my brother would not have gone abroad,

nor should I have remained so quietly at Molyneux Castle, had we dreamed he was so near his end."

"Who, my dear Emma, could surmise it? Inscrutable are the decrees of Providence! Though for the last six years my whole life has been, I may say, devoted to the comfort and consolation of poor Sir Harry, visiting him daily, and holding my time, as far as my professional duties would permit, at his disposal, I discerned of late no peculiar change in him. He talked, perhaps, a little more than usual of John. But that naturally arose from the remarkable circumstances which rendered your brother the theme of general conversation. Sir Harry's bodily health was in its normal condition."

"But to die without one of his children in the house! — What a scandal to the world! — How we shall all be abused!"

"The world will know nothing of the matter. The family will, I trust, be united at the last mournful ceremony. Within an hour after Sir Harry breathed his last, I dispatched an express to Messrs. Rothschild, to beg they would send off a courier to your brother at Frankfort."

"But how do you know that John is at Frankfort?"

"His arrival there was announced in the very paper Lady Woolston was reading to your poor father when his fit came on. And as the Wroughtons are

spending their summer, as usual, at Homburg, it is probable they will travel home together. They will perhaps be here by Saturday or Sunday — at all events, in time for the funeral; the arrangement of which, I have, of course, taken on myself. All else must wait for the arrival and decision of Sir John."

Cold-blooded as she was, it caused a thrill in the veins of Mrs. Molyneux, to hear the title assigned to her brother which certified that their father was numbered with the dead. Her lips refused to frame the inquiry she had been meditating concerning the disposal of his property.

But Harpsden was deterred by no such feelings of delicacy.

"I was apprised some months ago, by Henderson and Hall," said he, lowering his voice, lest it might reach the ears of Lady Woolston's attendants, in the adjoining room, "that Sir Harry's will was deposited in their custody; and as there is nothing to necessitate a premature examination of the document, *there* it had better remain till his son and successor is on the spot. With a property so strictly entailed, I almost wonder, poor man, that your father thought it necessary to make one."

Emma did not choose to suggest, what he knew better than herself, that Sir Harry's savings must have been considerable. But she felt persuaded, from

Harpsden's air of self-possessed resignation, that the contents of the will were as familiar to him as they were satisfactory.

From the time his assiduities placed him in such complete possession of the confidence of Sir Harry, Harpsden had been no great favourite with the rest of the family; and now, there was something so stealthy in the manner in which he went about his melancholy duties in the house, as thoroughly to disgust his sister-in-law. She felt convinced he had been playing a shabby part; or what, in her hasty letter to her husband, she described as "feathering his nest." For the Woolstons, crossed with Wraysbury, were a mercenary race; and even under the dread presence of death, could not lose sight of the pecuniosities connected with the crisis.

Yet, in the dreary six days intervening between her own arrival at Harrals, and that of her brother, there was enough to subdue a spirit even as mercurial as that of Mrs. Molyneux, into a holier mood. The poor wasted mother, dying by inches before her eyes, was sufficiently conscious of her presence to press her hand thankfully, in acknowledgment of her tardy attentions; and, as if in deference to the speechlessness of the death-stricken widow, every other voice in the house was hushed to a whisper. All was still in the vast cheerless old mansion; and but that, on the third night after Sir Harry's decease, the night when his

coffin was closed and the watchlights extinguished, equinoctial gales began to blow, which seemed to shake it to its foundations, — Emma Molyneux, stationed beside Lady Woolston's bed, might have wondered what had become of the dispiriting noises which used to strike awe into her childhood.

When a girl, she had detested Harrals; nor had the voice of affection, at any subsequent moment, recalled her to her early home, to enjoy it as Denny Cross was enjoyed by the tender-hearted Maria. Unblinded, therefore, by natural partiality, she saw the old place as it was, dilapidated and forlorn; her sense of its imperfections quickened by the higher notions of comfort she had acquired at Molyneux Castle, or amid the superficial graces of Parisian life.

"Lucky for poor John," thought she, as she surveyed the discoloured paint and paper, the faded carpet and cracked ceiling of the chamber nearest to Lady Woolston's, assigned to her use, "that this prodigious fortune of his has come in time to enable him to rebuild the family seat. These walls seem scarcely able to hold together."

During the day-time, the cawing of the rooks wore down her spirits. Throughout the night, the howling of the wind was still more appalling. But that she dared not, for fear of the world's reproof, desert the bedside of her paralysed mother, willingly would she *have* betaken herself to the Rectory, to listen to what,

at other times, she especially avoided, — the tedious egotism of poor Carry's sick-room. The details of her perpetual ailments would have been preferable to the dismal echoes of the house of death.

At length, on the very eve of the funeral, the rattle of an arrival shook the yew hedges of the court-yard. Voices were heard in the hall, and steps on the stairs; and after a little whispering in the corridor, John Wraysbury, escorted by Harpsden, entered his mother's room, and placed himself reverently on his knees by her bed-side. Too late, however, for recognition! During the last four-and-twenty hours she had ceased even to grasp the hand of her daughter. Her life was at its last ebb; and the household had already began to whisper in the servants' hall, that the funeral of their late master ought to be post-poned, in order that the aged couple might be laid together in the grave. — Such had been the sub-servience of the timid Lady Woolston to her wedded lord, that she dared not survive him! —

CHAPTER X.

THERE was no hypocrisy in the demonstrations of grief with which John Wraysbury humiliated himself beside his mother's dying pillow and his father's coffin. He was thoroughly self-rebuked. He could not forgive the obduracy with which he had turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of Farmer, and the suggestions of his own heart. His father ought not to have died without a mutual exchange of forgiveness. As regarded himself, it was a fault he must repent to the latest day of his life.

Fain would he have avoided the painful necessity of bringing his wife, for the first time, to Harrals, under sanction, as it were, of the helplessness of the dead; by dispatching her, from the last posting stage to Denny Cross. But of this, though eager to clasp her darling again in her arms, Maria would not hear. She knew that her husband was about to undergo a thousand trials which it was her duty to be at hand to alleviate. The new Lady Wraysbury, like her predecessor at Harrals, was prepared to fulfil to the letter of the law of GOD, her marriage vow.

The afflicted man, therefore, possessed a solace denied to two of his sisters. For Gerald Molyneux

had not found it convenient to curtail his engagements in the north to comply with the summons of his wife; nor had Wroughton thought it necessary to accompany *his*, since she was able to travel under the protection of her brother. Both sisters, however, were too much engrossed by the critical state of their surviving parent, whose life seemed to hang on a thread, to remark that they were alone together, for the first time since their respective marriages; as guests, too, of the brother whose boyish life they had made so miserable under that roof, by turning to their advantage the preference systematically accorded by Sir Harry to his daughters.

The dreaded day of the funeral came and passed; and poor Lady Woolston lay unconscious, as before. But Messrs. Henderson and Hall, having attended the ceremony and deposited in the hands of Sir John Wraysbury the will alluded to by Harpsden, his two daughters and the husband of the absent Caroline were summoned to be present at the reading, in all the solemnity of their crape and bombazine. The new baronet was eager to get through the business. He wished to be alone with his wife; or rather to unite with her in contrite and careful attendance upon the mother whose hours were numbered. As to the will, how could it personally concern him? The estate was now his own. All the rest would naturally be bequeathed to his sisters. He only hoped that his

poor father might not have been tempted, in a moment of anger, to inscribe some bitter sentence against him, in a document that must perforce be made public. For even Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, Bart., with seventy thousand a-year, was not proof against the animadversions of the world.

But on this head, he was speedily reassured. The will of Sir Harry had been executed in his own boyhood; immediately after lodgment of the sum of money to pay off the incumbrance on the Harrals estate, for the benefit of his younger children.

At that period, his personalty had probably amounted to no very considerable sum; for the whole was bequeathed in a very few words to his wife, Dame Janetta Woolston, who, as she already possessed, "by virtue of her marriage settlement, the power of appointment over her own fortune of fifty thousand pounds," said the testator, "will be pleased to dispose of this further legacy, in favour of one or other of our children, or to be equally divided between them."

"A most equitable distribution," observed Sir John Wraysbury, when, having finished his recitation of the will, the solicitor appeared to glance towards him for his opinion, as he laid it on the table and deliberately replaced his spectacles in their case.

"Equitable, certainly," was Mr. Henderson's reply. "Yet I am inclined to fancy, Sir John, that my late respected client contemplated some ulterior arrange-

ment. For in the course of the seventeen years which have elapsed since this will was made, the value of his personalty has been increased, by economy and a few successful speculations, from five or six thousand pounds to nearly eighty."

At this intimation, neither his daughter nor his son-in-law could restrain a start, or change of colour.

"So that, with the original sum in settlement, my poor mother holds at her disposal about one hundred and thirty thousand pounds?" inquired Sir John, pleased that so handsome a provision should fall to the share of his sisters.

"*Held* at her disposal," emended the family solicitor. "I say *held*, Sir, because, in her ladyship's condition of mind and body, she is utterly incompetent to alter the dispositions of a will which, at her desire, my partner and self drew up for her on occasion of your marriage."

"Of my marriage?" reiterated Sir John, in much surprise, vexed to find that, though he had escaped reproof at the hands of his father, the milder Lady Woolston had judged it necessary to place on record her displeasure.

"Finding it probable that the resentment of Sir Harry might for years restrict to very narrow limits the income of her son," continued Mr. Henderson, addressing the whole family party, "her ladyship considered it her duty to assign to him, without reserve,

the whole of her property, either then in enjoyment, or to accrue at any future time."

"But Lady Woolston could not then contemplate the enormous addition to her fortune made to her by the will of Sir Harry?" faltered Harpsden, turning as pale as his white cravat.

"Certainly not," calmly rejoined his brother-in-law; "nor the fine property to which I have in the interim succeeded."

"But you are of course at liberty to decline the legacy, or at my poor mother's death, to refuse to administer," said Emma, amid all her consternation preserving a truly Woolstonian eye to her interests.

"Pardon me, Madam," interrupted the solicitor. "Sir John has no voice in the matter. The assigns of her ladyship's deceased trustees, myself and my partner, are appointed executors to her will; and as it directs that at the death of her only son the property shall be divided among the children of his marriage with Miss Pennington, he has only a life interest in it. — Sir John cannot move a step in the business."

"Then I call it a most iniquitous job!" — cried Harpsden, half choked with astonishment and indignation. And though Emma and Clara were too well-bred to indulge in such direct accusations and vociferous tones, in that house whose business for a fortnight past had been transacted in whispers, their

opinions were probably coincident with those of their clerical brother-in-law.

The man with the old head on young shoulders, — though his head was somewhat younger and his shoulders a great deal older than when he earned the designation, — kept his temper. From which, the Reverend William Harpsden inferred that he also meant to keep the money.

"It will be as well to moderate your expressions, Harpsden," mildly observed Sir John, "till we have ascertained that the property is as considerable as Mr. Henderson at present believes; and that my poor mother has made no revocation of her bequest since my accession of fortune." Which latter suggestion appeared so much within the scope of probability, that the mercury rose as by a sun-stroke in the veins of Harpsden and his sisters-in-law.

"Certainly, certainly," they unanimously exclaimed; "nothing so likely as that Lady Woolston should have made a later will."

Mr. Henderson shook his head. He knew how much effort it had cost the meek-spirited or rather weak-spirited woman only to sign the one he had drawn up under her instructions. That with her own brains she should have concocted and with her own hand written another, was much as if the faint-footed Emma had talked of ascending Mont Blanc.

"Nor are we certain that it is yet too late for the

cruel circumstances of the case to be laid before her," said Harpsden, endeavouring to swallow his rising choler. "Dr. Fermor pronounced yesterday that her Ladyship was a shade better; — that there were slight indications of returning consciousness."

"An effort of nature may, even to the last, be hoped for," added Clara, who was a general dealer in plausibilities.

"And why not an effort of art?" retorted Harpsden, briskly. "I have thought from her first seizure, that the medical men were strangely supine." Yet none of those present could bring to mind that he had previously made such a suggestion. "No case is so hopeless that medical science should relax in its endeavours. *Nux vomica* has not been tried; which is often used at the Union to stir the torpid muscles and faculties of aged and paralytic patients. Among the higher classes, galvanism has been found of even greater efficacy."

The young head on middle-aged shoulders could bear this no longer. "In one word, Harpsden," said he, "I am convinced that my two sisters here present, and even poor Carry, your wife, have confidence in my honour and principles. I am not a money-thirsting man, as the nature of my marriage must have shown you; and you consequently cannot attribute to interested motives what I am about to say. But by heavens, Sir! I will not have the last days of my

poor harmless mother disturbed by experiments, in hopes that a new signature may be extorted from her hand. You yourself informed me, on my arrival, that her mind was totally gone; that her life could scarcely be called existence; that the doctors announced their art to be unavailable. It would do little credit to any of us to torture her, at the eleventh hour, for mercenary purposes."

The Reverend William evidently thought otherwise. A moment afterwards, he hastily quitted the library, as if no longer able to endure the company of a man who had robbed him and his family of the third of one hundred and thirty thousand pounds; but, in reality, to dispatch a fresh express to London for the attendance of a celebrated mesmeric practitioner, to whom the Zoist attributes the miracle of having occasionally restored the dead to life.

Perhaps the mere inditing of his mystic name under her roof, may have had some influence over the mind of the comatose patient. For that very evening, her children were startled from the tea-table by the astonishing intelligence that Lady Woolston had not only moved her head upon her pillow, but pronounced several unconnected words; on the strength of which, Mr. Harpsden was fetched from the parsonage to participate in their joy at symptoms so favourable.

But poor Carry, to whom they were imparted, discerned, with the instinct of an invalid, that the seeming

rekindling of the vital spark was merely the flickering of the expiring lamp.

"Remember, my dear William," said she, to her husband, as he was quitting the room, "that when poor old Wardlaw died last year, after many days of seeming insensibility, he recovered sufficient consciousness to summon his grand-children; but only to expire in the act of giving them his blessing."

Her husband heard, or heeded, not! — Already, he was at the foot of the stairs, on his way to Harrals; secretly of opinion that if his mother-in-law should recover sufficient consciousness to take leave of her children and expire after the act of dividing her property among her daughters, she would have accomplished her last duties even better than old Wardlaw.

But this was not to be. Lady Woolston never came fully to herself. The utmost demonstration of her lucidity of intellect consisted in endeavouring to raise to her blanched lips the hand of her son, on whom her glazed eyes were fixed with tender recognition; muttering at the same time certain words which he could only interpret into, — "By your father, — beside my husband!" — as if in reference to the grave towards which she was hastening. —

Before the breathless Rector made his appearance, all was over, and his brother-in-law was escorting Emma and Clara from the room. They did not again issue from their own; and Harpsden could find no

other auditors than the London solicitors, for his angry complaints that, for many years past, he had been shamefully deceived, and abominably trifled with.

"To those old people," said he, "I have been more a servant than a son-in-law."

"At your own instance, Sir, or at theirs?" drily inquired the formal Mr. Henderson.

"From a sense of duty towards my family," he replied, gaspingly; "who, I believed, would reap the fruits of my devotedness."

"I understood, Sir, that, only two years ago, Sir Harry presented you with the living of Harrals, for which he previously refused, through myself, a sum of four thousand eight hundred pounds?" persisted Mr. Henderson, still more stiffly than before.

"And what then? — That he might settle me close at his park gates, and command my time as though it were his own."

"An appropriation which might have been as easily effected, Sir, had he simply allowed you to retain the curacy that first introduced you to his notice, and an acquaintance with the Woolston family," replied the solicitor, in an authoritative tone.

"Since that period, Mr. Henderson, nine years have elapsed," retorted the angry Rector; "and by my union with his daughter —"

"You became entitled to the fortune secured to her by the marriage settlements of her parents; — a sum

of eight thousand three hundred and thirty-three pounds and a fraction, which, nine years ago, (as you justly observe), I had the honour to pay to your trustees. What further pretensions you may have formed, Mr. Harpsden, must have been purely speculative; and you must pardon me for adding, that your conduct in attacking Sir John Wraysbury in his own house, and with the body of his mother lying unburied, will recommend you as little to the good-will of your opulent brother-in-law, as to public approbation."

Mr. Harpsden, who had been standing, hat in hand, as if on the eve of departure, now clapped it fiercely on his head.

"Whether as a Christian or a man of the world, I have no lessons to receive at the hands of Messrs. Henderson and Hall," was his bitter rejoinder. — "When I have conferred with my brothers-in-law and fellow-sufferers, Molyneux and Wroughton, I shall be better prepared with a professional answer for the solicitors of Sir John Wraysbury."

CHAPTER XI.

THAT the last days of Sir Harry Woolston had been brought to a sudden end, by learning that the wide sea divided him from the son towards whom his heart had long been yearning, and from whom he was hourly expecting to receive overtures of conciliation and peace, can no more be doubted, than that, as in proportion the old man's feelings warmed towards the exiled John, the kindly glow had been quenched by cold water thrown upon it by Harpsden. — But all was now over. He was at rest. The struggle of life now remained with Sir John. Let us hope that the slumbers of the proud old baronet were not disturbed in his leaden coffin, by the knowledge that the same suit of sables, the same black liveries, assumed for the Liverpool merchant, served also as a token of respect to Sir Harry Woolston, of Harrals.

It was a sad persecution, meanwhile, to Mrs. Molyneux, that, on her return to the Castle, though her husband's family appeared to be prepared with the utmost sympathy for the filial sorrow she found it so difficult to assume, no one would enter into her resentments. Lady Dinton quietly reminded her how much she had neglected her parents; and that, had

she seen more of her father, he would have become attached to her children, and probably altered his will. — As to Sir John Wraysbury, as he had clearly done, said, and written nothing to suggest his mother's disposal of her property, the disappointed Emma's indignation appeared to be as groundless as it was injudicious.

Though Lord and Lady Dinton were not allowed to hear half the ill-language vented by their son, on his return from his sporting tour, they would not tolerate, on the part of Mrs. Molyneux, any harsh expression, which, in their opinion, not only sinned against the mourning garb worn for a father and mother, but afforded "so bad an example." — Lady Dinton, herself the most dutiful of wives, regarded the death of Lady Woolston as one of the finest instances of conjugal devotion since the martyrdom of Arria, recorded in Enfield's Speaker; — one of the few English classics with which her Ladyship's unsophisticated school-room rendered her familiar.

At Denny Cross, the subject was treated with similar reverence. Though Sir John Wraysbury was of opinion, like the "divine Clarissa," that his excellent female parent would have done more good in her generation, by showing a little less submission as a wife, and a little more spirit as a mother, he treated her memory with as much tenderness and his father's with as much respect, as though all the virtues had

been their portion usually attributed to country baronets on the fancy monuments that crown their family pews; and Denny Cross, in spite of the contumely with which it had been treated by the Woolstons during their lifetime, treated with due solemnity their death. — The old squire was not the man to speak otherwise than respectfully of parents in presence of their children.

Nor had the deportment of the Penningtons varied by a single shade towards the Wraysburys, since their wooden ladle became a gold apostle spoon. — What difference could the weedy villa, or Harrals, or the palace of which Sir John was already contemplating the erection, make in their feelings towards Maria, or their dear little Netta? —

They did not so much as perceive that Wraysbury himself was becoming a little altered; — not purse-proud, — not proud of his position in the county; — but self-absorbed, and more than a little harassed by the cares of wealth.

For the wise one who of old, framed the exhortation, "soul, take thine ease," was probably aware, by experience, that the ease of great men is seldom easy to take; nay, that souls able to command the enjoyments of this world, have almost more occasion for exhortation to enjoy themselves, than the Lazarus at their gates.

Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, for example, might

truly be called a favourite of fortune. No man of his time, perhaps, afforded a finer example of the partiality of the blind goddess. — And he had the more reason to luxuriate in his wealth that it had come without the smallest effort or self-compromise. — If he had done nothing to deserve, he had at least done nothing to secure it.

Yet such is the gracelessness of human nature, that, in the secrecy of his heart, — (that darker chamber, that iron safe, where people deposit their deeds and sentiments, as they deposit their worldly pelf in the fire-proof chests of Chubb,) — the new millionary had many grievances to enumerate.

In the first place, the enormous bequest of old Adam, and the rich legacy of his parents, were alike burthened with what he regarded as a ridiculous condition. — That lands inherited from sire to son since the Norman Conquest, should be tied up by entail, might be reasonable enough; otherwise, as in the case of the Penningtons, an ancient family would be peeled away into nothingness, by the spoliations of succeeding generations. But money, — money amassed by trade, which would increase and multiply like thistles, if the seed were dispersed by the power of taking wing, — ought not to be thus shackled. If judiciously invested, for instance, in the United States, who could even surmise the eventual profit of such a fortune? Yet so hampered was he by that foolish will, that the prin-

cipal was out of his own control, either for purposes of emolument or of generosity! —

Again, his father and mother, though aware that Harrals would require an outlay of forty or fifty thousand pounds to place the house and estate in tolerable order, had tied up their money for the benefit of children they had never seen, or chosen to see, or who might never exist; — and, under such circumstances, he scarcely felt himself master of his magnificent fortunes.

Whatever business he attempted to transact, he ran his head against the stone-wall of legal interdiction. — Not that he would have felt bound, under any circumstances, to adopt the suggestions of the Rector of Harrals, and abdicate his right to Lady Woolston's property in favour of his sisters, whose interests he had at his marriage so conscientiously respected, and who, in return, had coldly confirmed his sentence of ostracism. But willingly would he have held the money at his absolute disposal. —

Important as the golden dross had appeared in his eyes when dunned by his coal-merchant, it was, in fact, acquiring six times the importance in his estimation, now that he was rich enough to purchase a coal-mine.

"And have you really resolved then, dear Maria, to abandon Harrals, and to shut up the old house?" — inquired Sophy Pennington, (whose simplicity of

character often prompted her to ask questions which deeper-thoughted persons dare not venture,) when the new Baronet and his wife arrived at Denny Cross to claim their little girl.

"If you were to see the place, you would scarcely wonder," replied Lady Wraysbury. "Such a ruin! — such a desart! — Nothing that was not absolutely indispensable to render it weather-tight, has been done for the last twenty years." —

"Still, now that John is so well able to place it in repair —"

"It is not worth repairing; — the only thing to be done, is to throw it down and build a new one."

"Which you could well afford to do."

"But unless we should ever have a son," persisted Maria, "to what purpose? — Harrals is entailed, you know, on male heirs only." —

"Is it? — I never asked. I never heard the question discussed."

"Yes! If dear John were to die to-morrow, the Wiltshire Woolstons would inherit."

"How vexatious!" said Sophy, thinking only of little Netta, — who was busy with her doll in a corner of the room.

"Not altogether," rejoined Maria, who by close contact with the Woolstons was becoming a little more worldly-wise than the rest of her family. "For unless the entail had existed, John, at the time of our

marriage, would certainly have been disinherited by Sir Harry."

"Yes, — I remember now," replied Miss Pennington, "that, when he refused his consent, the entail was pleaded to my father, to prove that his opposition was not of vital importance."

"So that it would be absurd indeed to expend a vast sum of money in building on the estate, unless certain that it would descend to a child of our own," pleaded Maria.

"It certainly seems so. But yet, that fine old family seat!" argued her sister, who, in her rare visits to Northampton, had from the road so often admired, over the ill-repaired park palings of Harrals, its massive oaks and feathery beech-trees.

"The place does not gain by being viewed closer," said Maria, who remembered having shared the same partiality. "You can conceive nothing more desolate than the wind howling in the quadrangle of the crumbling old brick-house, with its grove of scraggy Scotch firs. Every thing at Harrals is old, without being venerable. The rooms look so shabby, and smell so musty; and the huge bedsteads and small three-cornered washhand-stands are so comfortless. Denny Cross is twice as enjoyable."

"Not more enjoyable than Harrals might easily be made."

"And then, it would be so disagreeable to John to be in perpetual collision with Mr. Harpsden!"

"His brother-in-law?"

"Now Rector of Harrals, — with whom he is on the most unpleasant terms."

"But John is fond of his sister?" —

"That is the worst part of it. Mrs. Harpsden was always his favourite; and it would give him pain to live so near her, yet never see her; particularly as she is a great sufferer."

"But if really attached to her, he would surely make the sacrifice of reconciling himself to her husband?"

"The Woolston family do not appear ready at reconciliations. But in this case, it would be useless; for Mr. Harpsden's habits and opinions are so totally opposite to my husband's, that John and he could never live on terms of amity."

Sophia sighed. She was thankful that, in the garden at Denny Cross, such *very* prickly plants were not indigenous.

"In short," said she, after a short reverie, "you have taken leave for ever of the house of which you once thought so much, and to which you are never to return!" —

"Not unless it should please God to give us a son."

"Of which, before long, there is every probability,"

said Sophy, more cheerfully. "So that I shall still live in hopes of hearing the rooks caw in the old pine-trees. But how anxious, — how *very* anxious, — John must feel to have a boy!"

"Very. — But far more so to be certain of a second. For if Netta were to inherit the Wraysbury property, which she must do if we have only a single son, —"

"*What* am I to do, Mamma?" inquired the little girl, whose ear was caught by the sound of her own name, as she sat dressing her doll.

"*Nothing*, my dear," replied Lady Wraysbury (after the fashion of so many mothers, who, by their perpetual hushings, seem to wish that their children had been born dumb; as well as by their incessant indiscretion, to suppose that that they were born deaf). — "He thinks," she continued, lowering her voice, but not so much as to escape the quick ear of Janetta, — "that it would be hard for a Woolston of Harrals to be looked down upon by his sister."

"How can he even fancy such a thing!" cried Sophy, her colour rising at the suggestion. "As if sisterly and brotherly love could be influenced by the possession of a few thousands more or less!"

"But even if the heiress showed no consciousness of the distance between their fortunes, the world would be less generous."

"The world — the world!" —

"Those who live in it, know that its verdicts must not be under-valued."

"Certainly not, — on questions of morality. But as regards attentions and hospitalities, the shade of difference likely to be shown to a girl with seventy thousand a-year in prospect, or a young man with only eight, is surely not worth thinking of."

"I quite agree with you. But John does not; — and the son, should he ever make his appearance, will perhaps be of his father's opinion."

"But I should like to have a brother, Mamma," cried Netta, now throwing down her doll, and resolutely joining the party. "I should like to have a great many brothers. — Why mayn't I have a great many brothers?"

"The more the merrier, darling," said her aunt, taking the child fondly on her knee. "And you would love them all very much, wouldn't you, Netta?"

"Yes — as dearly as you and mamma and aunt Bessy love uncle Hugh and uncle John." — It would have been hard to find a stronger standard of comparison!

"But if Harrals is to be shut up," observed Sophia, in order to close the delicate chapter of fraternity — "what is to become of you? — The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; — but Woolston of Harrals, since he became Woolston Wraysbury, seems to be without a roof to his head!"

"John has taken, for the present, a house in Carlton Gardens. He has still a world of business to get through. Though London is so cheerless in November, I am afraid we must spend the winter in town."

"Then why not leave this child at Denny Cross?" said Miss Pennington, accelerating the gentle trot upon her knee she was giving to the future heiress.

"No, no. Come with us to London, aunt Sophy," cried Netta, turning round to seal her petition with a kiss. "I love you dearly, — but I don't want to be away from papa and mamma." —

"My husband and I were going to make the same request," added Lady Wraysbury. "Indeed, you owe yourself to us, Sophy. To please my father, we renounced our claim for the journey to Marienbad."

But Sophia steadily declined the proposal. Not only because she considered that although he possessed a younger daughter peculiarly devoted to him, her place in life was by the fireside of her father; but because she was beginning to feel a little shy of those who seemed to think that even kindred blood could be warmed or chilled by fluctuations of fortune.

"I have been so little at Denny Cross of late," said she, "that I must spend the winter with my father and Bessy. When you were in sickness and sorrow, and needed my services, I did not mind leaving them. It is different now."

"Different as regards sickness and sorrow, — not

as regards need of your company," replied Lady Wraysbury, with tears gathering in her eyes.

"Yes — indeed, *indeed* we want your company, aunt Sophy!" added the little girl. — "You are so kind and comfortable. You are never cross or hasty. You put every thing to rights, — you keep everything in order. — And yet, everybody loves you."

Miss Pennington silenced her by a kiss. But her sister was scarcely discerning enough to perceive that the child had become already unconsciously conscious of her father's infirmities of temper, and her mother's languid indolence.

"The boy we are looking for, may perhaps arrive early in the spring, or a little sister for Netta in his place," said Lady Wraysbury, not a little mortified at her sister's refusal. "And John does not think me quite strong enough just now to dispense with a governess. If you were with us, he would not be so much afraid of Netta being too much in the nursery with old Nancy, or a fatigue to me. I tremble at the idea of that Miss Avesford. — Do, dearest Sophy, *do* secure me from the annoyance of a governess in the house, if only for a few months longer. — With a baby in my arms, I may perhaps less miss the company of this naughty girl!"

Instead of resenting the quiet selfishness which thus disposed of her time, and disregarded her inclination, Sophy in the end conceded to the entreaties and en-

dearments of her sister and niece; — and the squire was left once more to the gentle devotion of his dear Bessy.

A few days afterwards, the Wraysburys were settled in a magnificent mansion in Carlton Gardens, which some short-sighted epicurean had amused and ruined himself in furnishing, as if for the express purpose of ministering to the comfort of the new Crœsus.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN WOOLSTON had often complained in the miserable days so largely absorbed in vibrating per bus between Hendon and the Temple, that "he never had a moment to himself:" — a common murmur on the part of men of business. But the Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, who had obtained the royal consent to append the latter name to his patronymic, even though the honourable designation of "Sir" and "Bart." were prefixed and affixed to the W. W., grumbled much after the same fashion. —

He had now, however, to pay for his interviews with lawyers, instead of receiving payment; and his levees in Carlton Gardens, frequented by agents and purveyors of all sorts and descriptions, by whom scarcely a single object was forwarded, or provided, which his own inclinations prompted him to appropriate, were almost as vexatious as his old mornings at the Temple, where the fidgety clerk was chiefly occupied in staving off unwelcome intruders. — His correspondence with the Heralds' College touching his change of name, and with the Inland Revenue Commissioners touching the amount of his legacy duty, on the Wraysbury and Lady Woolston's estate, though

transacted by his solicitors, were carefully supervised by himself. Then, the widely extensive nature of the securities amassed by old Adam, — the mortgages to be called in, — the foreign bills and bonds to be investigated, — filled his hands with business. The picture-dealers, to whose scrutiny he had consigned the old man's collection to be valued for probate duty, came with their criticisms; assuring him that paintings which had cost thousands to his whimsical predecessor were copies, and worthless; while others, bought for a trifle, were invaluable. On finding that for a hideous little mutilated statue, purchased by the foreign delegate of Adam Wraysbury at the sale of a crowned head, (known to contain under its Crown as much knowledge of the Fine Arts as would have crushed Dr. Waagen), would be welcome to the British Museum, in exchange for its weight in silver, he began to take some interest in the objects classed in the legacy-duty schedule, as "furniture and objects of art." — Drawers full of cameos and intaglios, intermixed with bits of malachite or strings of coral, — bags, in which the rarest coins of the dead mintages, (if Latin and Greek monies may thus be designated,) lay jumbled with Irish half-pence, and farthings with lucky holes in them, — were submitted to a careful scrutiny; and on one occasion, while rummaging a heap of obsolete account-books, he was rewarded by discovering an oak-bound Codex Argenteus, well-qualified to make

the hearts of Panizzi, or the learned Dons of the Bodleian, sing for joy.

But the detection of these treasures, so loosely guarded, only seemed to worry him, by inspiring the notion that others of equal value might have been abstracted without exciting the notice of the deceased proprietor, or his own suspicions. Having heard of colossal fortunes made during the Wellington wars, by the mere cabbaging of journeymen employed by army clothiers, he began to fancy that the underlings of old Adam's office and household must have grown rich by picking up the scraps of his untold treasures.

By such anxieties, his peace had never been ruffled at the weedy villa. He began to see that the even hand of Providence, which forbids that "fortune ever come with both hands full," was supplying a succedaneum to the coal-merchant's bill! —

"You were overhasty, John, in sanctioning the sale of the house at Liverpool," said Farmer, the first time he consented to share a family dinner in Carlton Gardens. "It was a quaint old den. If you would have commissioned me, I should have dearly liked to overlook its incongruities before the Goths and Vandals laid hands upon it."

"I am sorry you never proposed it," replied his host. "In my cursory view, I probably under-rated its importance; and I intended to visit it again, before a sale took place. But my unlucky excursion to the

continent, followed by the melancholy events at Harrals, diverted my attention. So that, when, soon after my poor mother's death, Wortham and Stock apprised me that a very liberal offer had been made for the premises, I authorized a sale; premising only that the pictures, statues, and books should be reserved and dispatched to town."

"That is, as many of the books, statues, and pictures, as they thought proper to leave you! — And thus, the family-mansion of the Wraysburys, (for, after all, John, 'twas as much their family mansion as Northumberland House is that of the Percies,) has come to be dismembered: — one half being let, I find, to a Joint Stock Banking Company, — the other, to a beer-shop."

"The deuce it is! — I understood from Wortham that it was to be the residence of some mercantile firm."

"You understood? — I daresay you never inquired! — But I trust the *manes* of my friend old Adam will be easier to appease than the wrath of his kinsmen and fellow-townsmen; who seem to think that, having found such a mine of wealth within the old house, it ought to have been as sacred in your sight as the Santissima Casa of Loretto."

"My dear Farmer, I have renounced the task of endeavouring to (what footmen call) give satisfaction. My Northamptonshire neighbours are furious because

I do not choose to live in a Castle Rackrent, where the rats would have the advantage of me; or build in its place a palace, for the future benefit of a fiftieth cousin. — Liverpool is of opinion, you say, that I ought to make a gnat in amber of my great-grandfather's counting-house! — Even Hendon, doubtless, denounces me as a graceless truant. But, as the song says, 'Let them rave.' All this outcry only attaches me the more to Carlton Gardens: particularly when you can be persuaded to exchange your favourite arm-chair and pursuits for a place by my fireside."

Roger Farmer signified, though more by countenance than words, that the fire-side was far from distasteful to him. But he could not help observing — "Yet how are we to reconcile this strong attachment to Carlton Gardens, with the purchase you are meditating in Dorsetshire?" —

Sir John Wraysbury gave a start which caused his coffee-cup to overflow.

"You were laughing at me just now, Farmer," said he, "for having to sign myself 'W. W.!' — But you ought to append the same initials to your own name, — as Wizard and Warlock. — I never mentioned this intended purchase to mortal breathing."

"Not even to *me!*" interposed Maria, "which I resent as a breach of conjugal privilege."

But while she remonstrated with such loving eyes and so sweet a smile, even Roger Farmer felt that

petticoat government could not be very irksome, where, as in the present case, the petticoat was of woven lambswool.

"I was in hopes of affording to my wife an agreeable surprise, when my purchase was complete," said Sir John, glancing reproachfully at the blabbing old bachelor.

"I bow to your rebuke, my dear fellow," replied Farmer, suiting the action to the word; "but though I have often heard that there were secrets in all families, I fancied yours was exempt."

"I will forgive you at once," rejoined his friend, "if you will only tell me, in return, how you made the discovery."

"In the simplest manner. I was at Dovetail, the conveyancer's, this morning, on business of my own; which he could not attend to, because he was poring over the title-deeds of Lynchcombe, on which he said he had an opinion to give by Thursday next. Knowing that the property had been in the Latimer family ever since the Lord Harry filched it from the church, I felt somewhat curious concerning the intended purchaser."

"But my solicitors expressly conditioned that my name should not be mentioned?"

"Nor was it. It was *that* betrayed you. He told me he was not at liberty to disclose the name of his client; a gentleman who, having recently inherited an

enormous fortune, imagined that the price would be raised upon him if his name were quoted in the market."

"Well?" — demanded Sir John, a little impatiently.

"Very little more!" added Roger Farmer, with a knowing smile. "'Wraysbury, for a thousand!' I exclaimed, when he had made this explanation. And I saw, by the biting of Dovetail's lips, that I had hit the bull's-eye."

"I have not often been accused of over-prudence," said Sir John, *not* a little nettled. —

"Nobody accuses any body of any thing, now-a-days, unless by a letter to the newspaper under a false signature," returned Farmer, gaily. "But I have often suspected that you owe the squareness of your well-curled crop to an over-development of the organs of caution, — a fault on the right side, my dear John. Because, with the utmost of our care, the best-kept secret usually becomes public at a month's end! Even the mysteries of the cabinet ooze out, — even secret committees find an echo."

"But the authorship of Junius, and of the Icon Basilike, Mr. Farmer?" — pleaded Sophy, in a gentle voice.

Roger Farmer stared. He had not suspected the habitually silent young lady of Denny Cross of caring

for any other authorship than that of a washing-bill or recipe-book.

"You are a scholar, then, Miss Pennington?" said he, with almost contemptuous surprise.

"Scarcely a better one than my little niece; but I have heard my Cambridge brother discuss the question. — If, however, you wish to reduce me to humbler ground, tell me who invented railways, or who murdered Eliza Grimwood?"

"Or who exacted of Napoleon the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, — or who beheaded Charles the First," — added Sir J. W. W.

"Even in private families," said Lady Wraysbury, "what innumerable mysteries are maintained!"

"To go no further than my own," added her husband, — "(as we are almost a family circle, I may venture to allude to the subject). There is my brother-in-law, Wroughton, as great a social enigma as the Man in the Iron Mask. — He has been eight years Clara's husband; and I know no more of his fortune or origin than my father did when, on the mere strength of an introduction from Gerald Molyneux, and chiefly to relieve my mother from the cares of chaperonship, he gave him his daughter."

"But to Sir Harry he must have explained his parentage?"

"He stated that he was from the north — a wide word; — and that his father and mother died when he

was very young, leaving him to the care of an uncle, who was also dead. He had some property in the French funds, which, with her own fortune, he proposed to settle on Clara."

"But all this is lucid enough?" —

"If his *ipse dixit* sufficed. But some people declare that he is an illegitimate son of the late king; — others, that his real father was hung for forgery; — and certain it is that, at the last moment, nothing tangible was forthcoming for investment but Clara's eight thousand three hundred pounds."

"Yet they appear to be very well off?" observed Lady Wraysbury. "We found them in the best apartments of the best hotel at Homburg; and I am assured that, during the winter, they give the best dinners in Frankfort."

"Which is exactly what constitutes the mystery of the case. Molyneux, by whom he was introduced to Clara when she was travelling with Emma on the continent, knows no more of his history than we do. — He first met him at Baden, as we saw him the other day at Homburg, the best-dressed and best-mannered Englishman in the place; — quiet, unobtrusive, knowng every one, and an honorary member of the best club of almost every capital in Europe; — never appearing to have much money at his disposal, but never in want of it."

"Without o'erflowing, full," said Farmer, in conclusion.

"If he were a Russian," added Sir John, "we should conclude him to be a spy. But an English *mouchard* is as apocryphal in natural history as the monsters of heraldic science."

"A blackleg is the nearest interpretation."

"But he does not answer to the name. There is nothing flash about Wroughton. He is well-educated and well-bred."

"An embodied mystery, certainly. But if his wife be happy with him, his antecedents do not much concern you."

"Pardon me. Before I make a friend and companion of him, I must obtain a key to the cipher."

"I fancied that Mrs. Wroughton accompanied you home from Germany? Could *she* afford you no information?"

"I was too much engrossed by anxiety concerning my father and mother, even to seek it. We were sitting down to dinner for the first time with the Wroughtons, actually taking our first glass of wine together since their marriage, when I was called away from table to receive that terrible dispatch from the hands of Baron Rothschild's clerk."

"An ill omen, certainly."

"And now that I have thought over Wroughton's singular mode of existence, I have begun to fear that

my sister's reserve may proceed from domestic uneasiness. Mrs. Wroughton no more resembles the gay, cheerful Clara Woolston —"

"Than Sir John Woolston Wraysbury resembles my pains-taking pupil," rejoined old Farmer. "My dear fellow, time and tide suffice to work the strangest transformations! — No man, quoth the proverb, differs so much from another, as the same man from himself, at a former period of life; a trite saying, which my experience fully confirms. I, for instance, am no longer the working bee of Lincoln's Inn. In time, my dear John, I may ask you to put me up at Boodle's."

"I should as soon think of putting up your banns in church!" — said Wraysbury, laughing. "But married or single, you are a pleasanter riddle to read than Wroughton, of whom I always dread to learn that he originally sprang out of a crucible, or that he has evaporated, leaving only a whiff of brimstone behind."

Both his wife and guest discerned so clearly, in this sudden outbreak against Wroughton, a desire on the part of Sir John to divert their attention from Lynchcombe, that they did not again advert to the subject. But though acquiescent, Maria was not pleased. She felt that, at the weedy villa, her wishes would have been consulted in the choice of a new abode.

"But why surprised?" said Sophy, when made the confidante of her vexation; "is it not as old as Adam, that when men cease to be our slaves, they begin to be our masters?"

"John had always a will of his own," rejoined her sister, mournfully. "He proved it to Sir Harry Woolston, by his marriage."

"On which occasion, you found no fault with him!" said Sophy, cheerfully. "So take my advice, dearest sister; adopt, as far as you can, and on all occasions, that said will of his own, and the grand mansion at Lynchcombe will be always as full of love and sunshine, as the humble one at Maple Hill!" —

CHAPTER XIII.

It was probably because he held it a highly critical matter to decide upon a residence for himself and his posterity, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds, that Sir John had not augmented his puzzlement by taking counsel with his wife; whose endowments of head were far less valuable than those of heart. — The step was nearly as vital to his comfort as that of matrimony itself; and since in marrying he had consulted no inclinations save those of John Woolston, he assigned the same authority onthe present occasion to those of Sir John Wraysbury. —

When a poor bus-haunting lawyer of thirty-one, he had looked on life, as a prodigal on his purse, as a thing that was to last for ever. But now that the sands in his hour-glass were of gold-dust, he counted every grain with penurious care.

"I have now attained," thought he, "half the allotted age of man; and cannot afford to trifle with what remains. The Government Commission spent half-a-dozen years in finding a residence for the Duke of Wellington. *I* must find one promptly, and set the bricklayers to work. My crotchets about household comfort can only be gratified by building. In London

one has no elbow-room for whims and fancies. But a ready-made house in the country would be like a condemned cell." —

And lo! just as the passion for brick and mortar was strongest upon him, Lynchcombe appeared in the market; a family estate to which, for a century past, a decayed family had been unable to render justice. As in the case of most great estates, the house was not so much as reckoned in the bargain; so that even the prudent millionary might feel justified in throwing it down. — He resolved, however, to build on the same site. He could not choose better. — A noble down, partly clothed with timber, sheltered it from the north-wind; while the façade commanded a fertile valley with peeps of the sea, at two miles' distance; — far enough off to escape the monotonous sound of the waves; near enough to adorn the landscape with inlayings of silver, sapphire or lapis lazuli.

Before the winter was over, the purchase was complete; and by the time the crocuses started up through the sooty soil of Carlton Gardens, the plans of a renowned architect had been carefully corrected and retouched by Sir John. A contract with first-rate builders was speedily signed; and a magnificent tinted drawing prepared to figure in the architectural room of the Royal Academy Exhibition, purporting to be the "South front of a mansion in process of erection at

Lynchcombe, Dorset, for Sir John Woolston Wraysbury, Bart.—"

And yet, his wife had never seen the spot! — Having prudently adopted her sister Sophia's philosophy, she refrained from thwarting him by questions or objections; and by the time all the above preliminaries were adjusted, the time was so near at hand that was to decide the question of heir or no heir, that a journey into Dorsetshire simply to gratify her curiosity, would have been highly imprudent.

One only person, indeed, ever attempted to stimulate her interest in the subject. Roger Farmer, who, like other shy men, having once broken the ice of his reserve towards the family of his former pupil, seemed to find the luxurious yet tranquil life of Carlton Gardens completely to his taste, often lounged in, as a privileged friend, and occasionally ventured to reproach Lady Wraysbury for not taking a more active part in the pursuits of her husband. With an old bachelor's blindness or indifference to the requirements of her position, he wanted her to hurry down into Dorsetshire and decide for herself whether the ancient mansion of the Latimers were not tenantable, and whether the atmosphere and aspect suited her fancy, before eighty or a hundred thousand pounds were expended in creating a palace on the spot.

Again and again did he remonstrate with her supineness; till at length, perceiving that her sister was

harassed by his interference, Sophy Pennington remonstrated in her turn.

"Depend upon it, Mr. Farmer," said she, "interference between married people is almost always injurious. — When really attached, as is the case with Maria and her husband, they understand each other's mutual claims better than any other person can define them. My sister is happier in making her husband's will her law, than if enacting laws of her own."

The dry old lawyer stared at her in silent amazement. — He had seldom been subjected to a rebuke; and here was a young woman, — an ignorant, a mere rustic, — who presumed to give him a lesson! —

"You have affronted him," said Lady Wraysbury, anxiously, when, soon afterwards, he took his hat and his departure. "He will never come here again; and John will be terribly annoyed."

"John would be far more annoyed if, by his officious advice, Mr. Farmer managed to sow dissension between you," persisted Sophy.

"*That* I defy him to do. But he has as little the inclination as the power. He wishes us well. Only he cannot forget that dear John was once his pupil; or bear in mind that he is twenty years younger than himself."

"Not *twenty*, — only fifteen, —" said Miss Pennington. And if her sister had not been wholly engrossed by thoughts of her absent husband and coming

baby, she would perhaps have felt some surprise that Sophy should have made so exact a calculation.

Miss Pennington's prediction that, in spite of the lecture he had received, the old bachelor would not fail to return, was speedily verified. His visits to the house had become habitual to him. — He had appropriated to himself a chair by the fireside, commanding a cheerful view of the park, in which he sat quietly caressing his favourite leg, and answering in monosyllables the kind questioning of Maria; till daylight waned, and firelight encouraged the shy man to confidential chat. — Then, when he felt that his uncouthness was screened from notice, he would expand into a brilliant flow of anecdote, derived from literary and professional sources; till the sisters ceased to wonder at the predilection for his society so long evinced by Sir John.

If the officious butler brought lights, as a hint that it was time for visitors to depart and ladies to attend to the dressing-bell, he became suddenly dumb, and never outstayed the warning.

At length the momentous crisis arrived, and the happy Wraysburys found themselves once more parents of a son; not, as on the former occasion, of a feeble infant; but of a boy of the first magnitude, destined to do honour to the baronetage and to Harrals. — It was not, however, so much on that account that Sir John took pride in him, as because he beheld in him the

precursor of a younger brother, — the future Wraysbury of Lynchcombe.

Poor little Netta subsided rapidly into insignificance. It was only aunt Sophy who made her as much as ever an object of attention. — Dear, pretty, loving little Netta, — so charmed with her new brother as even to submit patiently to the thraldom of the school-room, and the arrival of Miss Avesford, the patent governess, — the result of his auspicious birth.

Letters of congratulation arrived in quick succession from the three aunts of the future baronet; — their husbands abounding in joy in a P. S. Even Harpsden seized the occasion to send his "heartfelt felicitations" under shelter of a flag of truce: with certain allegorical allusions to olive-branches and peace-making, which Wraysbury might have accepted as genuine, had it not unluckily occurred to him that the living of Lynchcombe was worth twelve hundred a-year, and the present incumbent on the verge of his threescore and tenth.

"It is so truly kind of you, my dear Farmer, to spare me the bore of a *tête-à-tête* with that dear good Sophy, now that I am a temporary widower," said Sir John to his old friend, whom he often persuaded to stay dinner, when he called in Carlton Gardens, inquiring after the "mother and child." "Sophy is a good soul; but she has not her sister's mental endowments. My wife, however, will miss her sadly

when she goes back to Denny Cross, which she insists upon doing the moment Lady Wraysbury is about again."

But the rich baronet's home-dinings were by no means so frequent as those of "poor" John Woolston's had been. — He was not only re-elected into his old club, but into several others, both fashionable and political; — and the great people of his county, the Duke of Groby and Lord Marrington, exchanged visits with him, and were prompt in their invitations, the moment they arrived in town. It was understood that Sir John Wraysbury would seize the first opportunity to buy his way into parliament. At some future time, it was probable that the local consequence derived from his newly-acquired estates might even promote him to the representation of his county.

"My wife a woman of fashion? — No! any thing but *that!*" he exclaimed, when Roger Farmer, on seeing the diamonds of the late Lady Woolston brought home by an eminent jeweller reset for the mother of the heir of Harrals, began to tax her husband with a new order of ambition. "But I wish her to take in society the place that belongs to her, and which every one appears inclined to concede her. The Duchess of Groby proposed, of her own accord, to present her at court. Lady Marrington wants to share an opera-box with her. My Northamptonshire neighbours are

well aware," he added, in a lower key, as if somewhat nervous, concerning the rejoinder likely to be made by his sarcastic friend, "that it depends only on myself to press my claims to the dormant barony of Fitz-Alwyne; which my father with so limited an income never chose to do. —"

"Hillo, — hillo, — a *peerage* too?" — cried Farmer, in just the tone anticipated by Sir John. — "Why, my dear fellow, you are rising so rapidly in the world, that we shall be obliged to peg you down with cords, like a balloon, lest, in your over-inflation, you should rise into the clouds and burn yourself against the sun."

Wraysbury entertained a disagreeable suspicion that he was laughed at; particularly when Farmer added with a smile, — "I should be deuced sorry, I know, to stand between you and the Woolsack, if you happened to have a mind to it. Such a lucky dog as you are, I should consider my burial-certificate made out."

Meanwhile, no supplement to the coal-merchant's bill, or any other domestic vexation, came to disturb the christening-day of little Lord Fitz-Alwyne *in nubibus*. — His sponsors were appropriately aristocratic: and the festival that requited their attendance, called forth the most flowing periods of the fashionable journals. There was only one sad heart present on the occasion: that of the mother, who had already presented a son

at the altar, and lost sight of him in the grave. But her husband was indignant at her misplaced tears. That Harry Groby Woolston Wraysbury, son to a millionary and godson to a duke, was marked for a brighter destiny, he assured her as confidently, as though he had received to that effect a "private and confidential" missive from the Fates.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Molyneuxes returned to their gilded Belgravian cage, on the approach of Easter; or, to speak more intelligibly, at the close of the hunting season; the Honourable Gerald having lavishly enjoyed his truffles and claret, his plate and damask napery throughout the winter months, at the expense of the father and mother, whom he defined to his St. James's Street familiars as the "slowest coaches on the road;" — eking out the one day's sport per week, afforded by his solitary hunter, by mounts from brothers, cousins, friends, and neighbours, to not one of whom would he have afforded in return the loan of a wheelbarrow. The Honourable Gerald, without a merit either moral or intellectual, seemed to fancy he had come into the world with especial and gratuitous claims on the good offices of all mankind.

Like Count Almaviva in the play — that play as instructive as a sermon, — the only exertion incumbent on him had been "*la peine de naître.*"

"How amazingly your brother has made his way in so short a time!" said he to his wife, after his first visit to Carlton Gardens; — apparently astonished that a well-born man, with an income of seventy or eighty

thousand pounds, should have emerged without his aid from the Hendon omnibus and family trap of Denny Cross, into proprietorship of the neatest equipages in London.

"Yes, — Lady Wraysbury is a very different person from Mrs. Woolston; and the dowdy sister has judiciously returned to her dairy and cauliflowers. I wonder whether John, who behaves so shabbily to *us*, has done any thing for those people at Denny Cross?"

"Done *what?* — His capital is no more at his disposal than at ours. He might certainly make an allowance to old Pennington, or to any of us, out of his income, — of which he will never have spirit to spend a fourth. Nay, I should not be surprised if the very interest of it sufficed him."

"*I* should; — for he was affable enough to show me the ground-plan of the house he is about to build, as if expressly to topple into the sea, from the edge of some Dorsetshire down. — He told me would be finished in three years; and was to be completed out of his income!" —

"A hint perhaps that we had little to expect from his generosity."

"Generosity is a word that has no place in my brother's vocabulary. John was always cold-blooded and selfish. In alluding to-day to the Wroughtons, he had the audacity to say that the thousand pounds

left them by old Wraysbury, was a great windfall for them; as they could have no expectations from him."

"Pretty cool, I think, from a man who has just inherited a million and a half of money and a fine estate; besides having a hundred and thirty thousand pounds filliped into his face!" exclaimed her husband.

Mrs. Molyneux shrugged her shoulders, from irritation. "The lower classes," said she, "are always in arms against the graspingness of the aristocracy, and the *sang froid* with which the great enjoy luxury and leisure at the expense of the little. — But what is the inequality between Castle and Cottage, I should like to know, compared with that which affords purple and fine linen to an elder brother, and sackcloth and ashes to all the rest!"

Having uttered which curt philippic against the laws of primogeniture, she looked down with the air of a martyr on the velvet sleeve and ruffles of Brussels lace, for which, in spite of old Wraysbury's legacy, she had never dreamed of paying.

Though short-sighted enough to fancy that she was "a star, and dwelt apart," Mrs. Molyneux abided at one of the lowest points of social order: whereas the old Squire of Denny Cross, so far from submitting to have "something done for him" by his wealthy son-in-law, had been strongly opposed to his daughter Sophy even remaining the inmate of the Wraysburys, now

that their overbrimming riches enabled them to dispense with her kindly presence.

Both Gerald and his wife, meanwhile, were nettled to find that, without any intervention on their part, the Wraysburys had received courteous invitations from Lord and Lady Dinton. The Dintons were not brilliant people, but their light burned steadily and clear. Their equitable minds could not be brought, by their son's representations, to impute it as a fault to Sir John that two of his nearest relatives had given him a life-interest in their property; and when, in the course of the solemn dinner-party held in his honour, he announced an intention of occasionally residing at Harrals, they hailed the news as satisfactory alike to the politics and pleasures of the county.

But the announcement, easily as it was made, and applausively as it was received, was wrung out of a penitent corner of Wraysbury's heart. — From the moment of the birth of his boy, — like all only sons, the sweetest infant that ever saw the light, — he had reproached himself with the colossal nature of his plans at Lynchcombe. — Though unable to alienate a guinea of the principal of Adam Wraysbury's fortune in favour of the heir of Harrals, yet by appropriating at least forty thousand pounds a-year of his splendid income, for three years to come, to perfect the estate in which part of the Wraysbury funds was invested, he seemed to have earned a right to devote a portion

of the residue to equalizing, in some degree, the positions of his children.

But if he owed it to the future Sir Harry Groby Woolston to insure him a comfortable home, he ought, perhaps, to have considered the matter before he signed the contract for his Dorsetshire Palazzo. — However, it was not yet too late. — He must screw down his family expenses by an additional ten thousand a-year or so, which would still leave him twenty thousand, for personal enjoyment. "And twenty thousand a-year, to myself and Maria, with our moderate views and pretensions," was his inward musing, "is, Heaven knows, more than enough." —

That any portion of his overgrown wealth was due to his country or his kind, — to forward public undertakings, — to facilitate the struggles of science, — to prosper the progress of the arts, — to relieve the moral and physical wants of the great nation in which the favour of Providence had ordained his birth, — never, for a moment, occurred to the old head on shoulders no longer young. He merely glanced at the subject by reminding himself that, notwithstanding the economy incumbent on him, he should be "pestered to death by directors of public charities and institutions; the sort of people privileged to pick one's pocket with the best intentions; who expect enormous subscriptions in return for their trumpery correspondence

— Impossible for *them* to know how miserably his hands were tied." —

While making up his mind in what proportion to subdivide his means for these purposes, he bethought him of taking counsel with his friend Farmer: a man too wise and practical to fancy that, to those who count their thousands by hundreds, a guinea is no longer a guinea. — But, on calling at the Albany, he was informed that Mr. Farmer was out of town.

"Where was he gone, and when he was likely to return?" — was the next question.

But old Margaret could not answer. Though an incomparable manufacturer of pepperpots, the itinerary of her master's travels was not vouchsafed in exchange for her bills of fare.

"Gone probably to look at some estate, for purchase," thought Sir John, as he retraced his steps along the covered way of Bachelor's Paradise. "Farmer has a craze for landed investment. — He might as well have told me, though. — I should have endeavoured to find for him something within reach of Lynchcombe. In time, one might perhaps have persuaded him to reside there. But I'm afraid *not*, — Farmer is too confirmed an old bachelor for country-life. — A London man — every inch of him. Farmer is not half himself when he gets half a mile from the Alfred."

A few days afterwards, among the letters placed

on his breakfast-table, — which were in the same ratio as regarded those he used to receive at Maple Hill, as his broad lands under the sun compared with the proportions of the weedy garden, into which that luminary seemed to think it *infra dig.* to shine, — was one addressed in the bold, straight-forward handwriting of the Q.C.

"As the fewest words are best when news of importance is to be communicated, my dear Wraysbury," wrote he, "I use no circumlocution to inform you that I am going to be married. To whom, my date will have already apprised you."

His dear "Wraysbury" had never looked at the date. — But the glance which now brought the words "Denny Cross" before his startled eyes, almost caused him to let fall the letter.

The simple, common-place, pleasant-faced, but far from pretty Sophy Pennington, — to be chosen as companion for life by that man of incomparable faculties and attainments! — How to account for it except by the remaining date of "May 4th," — a season of love and joy that warms the most rugged old tree into blossom.

But then, the sentiment that attracted him to Denny Cross, must have been of far earlier date; the growth of fireside interviews, and those family dinners where he had so often apologized to his friend for the humdrum company of his sister-in-law.

On resuming his letter, he found that the bridegroom-elect condescended to ample confession.

"I fell in love," wrote he, — and there was not a symptom of shame in the clear firm handwriting, recording the avowal, "so long ago as when I dined with you last year at the Clarendon; and every opportunity afforded me since, has convinced me that I then judged rightly in believing this dear Sophy of ours to be the type of every thing that is best in woman-kind: true and just, in word, thought, and deed; unselfish in heart, unprejudiced in mind. — As she has chosen to overlook my uncouthness in favour of a sincere attachment, we are to be made one as soon as the lawyers will conjoin our worldly goods: and Sophy writes to request her sister's countenance and presence at the wedding. — But lest I should convert my letter into a three-volume novel, by endeavouring to describe my present happiness, I hastily conclude by expressing a hope that you will find no fault with my henceforward subscribing myself,

"Your brother as well as friend,

"R. F."

Decidedly the most startling communication he had received since the broad sheet of Messrs. Wortham and Stock, communicating the contents of Adam Wraysbury's will! The provoking part of it was, that he

could not prevail on Maria to be as much astonished as himself; not even when she heard the amount of thousands per annum attributed by the profession to Roger Farmer. She was perhaps too much pleased to leave room for any other feeling; or was too fully aware of her sister's high appreciation of his moral worth and charm of companionship, to wonder that affection should follow. — To her husband's constant recurrence to "six or eight thousand a-year at the very least, and not a relation in the world," she turned a deaf ear. — The man, and not the money, rendered it a splendid match for Sophia.

"And to *me*," she exclaimed, "what a comfort! — We shall meet daily. The happiness of my life will be doubled."

For Sophia Pennington's letter, after announcing to her sister with the same sensible succinctness characterizing the communication of her sober lover, her impending change of name, went on to state that though Mr. Farmer, in deference to her predilections, had proposed that they should settle in the country, she had decided in favour of London. — So complete a change of habits, she felt, would never suit him. — Sophia evidently considered her bridegroom as too old a tree to be transplanted.

When the Wraysburys proceeded to Denny Cross for the wedding, they were not a little surprised and vexed to find that, of the whole family, the old squire

alone remained averse to the match. — He hated lawyers. The whole profession was typified in his mind by the country attorneys, who had occasionally dragged his pockets, and the judges who came with trumpets and shawms to transport sheep-stealers and acquit all murderers who could persuade twelve people in their senses to swear that they were out of theirs. And he consequently regarded with a distrustful eye the large fortune amassed by the middle-aged man, who so much resembled the master of the grammar-school where he had not received — but been defrauded of, an education. — It was with a sore heart and clouded brow that he saw Mr. and Mrs. Farmer drive off in their comfortable travelling carriage, on a bridal excnrsion to the lakes.

Throughout the remainder of the day, ay! and for several days following, he was seen drumming vacantly on the window-panes through which he had witnessed the departure of the newly-married couple.

But even his gentle daughter Bessy, the member of the Denny Cross family best skilled to interpret the erratic melodies with which her father enlivened this monotonous music, was puzzled to say whether, on the present occasion, the tune pretended to be "Merrily danced the Quaker's Wife," — or the "Dead March in Saul."

It certainly neither denoted cheerfulness in *him*, nor imparted it to his involuntary auditors.

CHAPTER XV.

MUCH has been said and written of

> The perils that environ
> The man who meddles with cold iron;

and the perils of the man who meddles with it in the shape of a trowel, are indeed deserving of sympathy. Before autumn set in, — before the Farmers returned southward from the tour they had extended to the Highlands, — Sir John Wraysbury began to wish he had been less precipitate in his demolition of the old hall.

For he had now no roof over his head, save that in Carlton Gardens. Harrals was dismantled, — Lynchcombe a mass of rubbish. Months must pass before even the foundations of the new house could be laid. Though strongly disposed to accomplish the foreign tour, so sadly thwarted the preceding year by his father's death, he was as unwilling to place himself out of reach of his architect, as Maria to expose her precious nursling to the risks of foreign travel. After much hesitation, therefore, and some grumbling, he found himself reduced to the usual Great British resource, — the coast; — with all its rumbling of bathing machines, and smell of seaweed.

Already, however, the accusation formerly hazarded by his friend Farmer, that he was wanting in moderation of mind, was becoming verified. With a healthy, happy family around him, and all but fabulous opulence at command, he was far from cheerful. — Enormous sources of anxiety seemed opened by his millions. Wortham and Stock on one hand, — Henderson and Hall on the other, — were perpetually besetting him with letters of business consultation, which a better philosopher would have answered by "Decide for your selves." — But Sir John had from the first manifested that, in every tittle, he was to be the arbitrator: as fidgety and circumstantial, now, as when adding up his weekly accounts at Maple Hill.

Admist these vexations, he was again provoked by what he considered the apathy of his wife. — Lady Wraysbury, a woman of pious mind, was of opinion that, favoured as they were, a single murmur against Providence was sinful. If *they* were not content with their lot, who on earth could be satisfied! — For *her* happiness, her two beautiful children sufficed; and such grievances as a contention with the proprietor of a stone-quarry, or a trifling embezzlement by the confidential agent of a plantation in Ceylon, were, she thought, unworthy consideration.

But to Sir John, even the children were less a source of delight than of old. — The flourishing little heir of Harrals, even when he came to be old enough

to lisp his father's name, was not half so dearly loved as had been the little Johnny, who lay forgotten in a cemetery in Kent, — whose smiles had brightened a home where nothing else was cheerful; and Master Harry was hailed chiefly as a harbinger of the future brother, who was to be one of the richest commoners in England, and might hereafter achieve a second peerage in the family, as Wraysbury, Lord Lynchcombe.

As to little Netta, endearing as she was, he could not look upon her without anxiety. If this boy of boys should never make his appearance, — if, after all his anxieties, the enormous inheritance of old Adam should fall to the eldest daughter instead of to a second son, — what a deathblow to his hopes, — what a misfortune to the future heiress! — For the money-loving John was one of those who believe that a rich woman has no chance of being sought and wedded for herself. — So many instances had occurred within his knowledge of heiresses consigned to utter misery by spendthrifts — who, having married them for money, seemed to think that when the money was gone, the tie it had served to cement was also nullified — that already he looked upon the little girl who, under Miss Avesford's tutorage, sat spelling the hard words in Mrs. Markham's History of England, as a predestined victim.

Affording by his discontent additional proof of the

truism, that "Man never *is*, but always *to be*, blest," he fancied his boy and girl would become a thousand times more precious to him, if a third pledge of love were vouchsafed. Such an event was to perfect his epoch of mortal happiness. But in the interim, he worried himself about nothings, which, however he might monster them, remained trifles in the eyes of other people.

To his new brother-in-law, he had scarcely courage to apply for sympathy in his imaginary distresses. But when, on arriving in town at the commencement of his second winter, he found the newly-married couple as comfortably settled in a newly-furnished house in Eaton Square, as ever the old bachelor had been in his chambers in the Albany, a good lesson was afforded to him, by the celerity with which the change had been accomplished.

"But why impute to magic the result of a little method?" said Farmer, when his admiration was warmly expressed. "Having once determined to take a wife, the purchase of a home for her became a necessary preliminary; and as soon as Sophy accepted me for better for worse, — with very little hope, alas! of the former change, — I assigned a certain sum to a first-rate upholsterer, to furnish it."

"With no instructions, — no interdictions?"

"Only those of Polonius, — that it was to be 'rich, but not gaudy.' I knew Sophia too well to fancy she

could entertain whims or fancies about the colour of a chintz, or shape of a wardrobe."

"At least, if the experiment were rash, it has answered. Your house is perfection."

"Because upholsterers understand upholsterers' business, better than I do. — If the man had employed me in former days to plead for him, he would not have pretended to instruct me how to manage his cause."

"I don't see that the cases are parallel."

"Tey are *not*. But I want to impress upon you the impolicy of over-legislation in trifling matters; the besetting sin of English nature!"

"But why impress it especially on *me?*"

"Because I heard yesterday, at my club, that you had declined the seat offered to you for Wadhurst, on the plea that you were at present too much occupied by your private affairs to have time for attendance in parliament."

"Such was the motive I chose to assign. But I understood that both the offer and my refusal were to remain confidential."

"Merchison mentioned the subject to me as to your nearest friend; hoping that I might determine you to rescind your resolution. — So short a time has elapsed since I mentioned to him your anxiety to get into the House" —

"That he fancies me a weathercock, blown about

with every breath. No matter. I have, to say nothing of other motives, made up my mind that, till my own affairs are settled, I will not meddle with those of the nation."

"Are any man's affairs *ever* settled? Till the coffin lid is soldered down upon us, my dear Wraysbury, is our time ever our own? The Lower House contains scores of men of business, and the Upper House as many of substance, whose ex-parliamentary duties are fully as responsible as your own."

Sir John did not dispute the fact; but he had made up his mind.

"I acknowledge my obligations to you, my dear Farmer," said he, somewhat peevishly. "I am free to confess that, but for your good word, I might have whistled for my grand uncle's fortune. But even this does not justify my relinquishing to your control my liberty of conscience, or freedom of action."

"God forbid!" cried his old master, smiling at his petulance; "I have trouble enough to manage my own. As to obligations, John, the advantage is decidedly on your side; for if you owe me a fortune, I am indebted to you for the domestic happiness which quadruples the value of mine. Till you forced me to your fireside, I had never seen or understood the charms of married life."

The argument was allowed to drop, as all arguments ought to do, which are not intended to end in

a quarrel. — To Wraysbury, the society of his old friend was priceless; not only from his superior knowledge and judgment, but because he was one of the few to whom the new millionary did not impute interested motives. For already, he was infected by the mental malady common to all the children of Mammon, of fancying that every body, — equals, — inferiors, — superiors, — were bent on levying contributions upon his purse. Like a valve shut by pressure, his heart had closed spontaneously under the weight of his gold. He had remained true to his hasty word, that not a member of his family by whom, in their poverty, his wife and children had been so cruelly neglected, should profit by his change of fortunes. With the Molyneuxes he was courteous, but distant. The nearest approach ventured towards him by Harpsden, now a widower, was a solicitation for his interest to get a presentation to the Charter-House for his son Olave, by way of hint that his own means would not afford him a suitable education. And when Clara wrote to him, about Christmas time, a letter damp with tears, entreating what she called the *loan* of one hundred pounds for the discharge of her private bills, in sending her *two*, (scarcely a pinch of dust out of his income), he begged her not to reckon upon a renewal of the gift as an annual gratuity.

He who, at Maple Hill, had so inveighed against the flintiness of rich relations, took little heed whether

the coals or wood of Harpsden and Wroughton exposed them to the dunning under which he had smarted. Nor was it one of the least recommendations to his friendship enjoyed by Farmer, that, the banker's-book of the Q. C. being always in a wholesome state, he had no occasion to turn his friends to account.

He was too much self-engrossed to perceive that, on the other hand, the predilection of Farmer in his favour had undergone considerable diminution. *His* soul was far too generous to sympathize with a man so thoroughly wrapt up in the things of this world. With all due allowance for the injurious lessons imbibed by John Woolston aforetime from the shabbiness of other people, it was difficult, nay, it was *impossible*, to forgive the narrowness of his egotism.

A far less pleasant companion than when softened by adversity, he could now talk and think of nothing but the rise and fall of public securities, — the value of land, — the prospects of the harvest, — and, above all, of Lynchcombe. — He seemed to know the price of every block of stone, every foot of timber on the premises; and was constantly dragging down poor Maria into Dorsetshire, though a third olive branch was budding, that he might surprise the wasters of his substance, and the carelessness of his clerk of the works.

Deeply mortified to perceive that the intellect he

had praised so highly to old Wraysbury, was now concentrated on questions of petty profit and loss, such as even necessitous men render subservient to the higher purposes of life, — Roger Farmer gradually receded from the society of the slave of Mammon. But when poor Lady Wraysbury's day of anguish at length arrived, and, after unusual suffering and considerable danger, she gave birth to a second daughter, even the gentle Sophia lost all patience with her brother-in-law, when, having replied by a coarse imprecation to the announcement that the infant was a girl, he rushed out of the dressing-room where he had been awaiting the result, and hurried down stairs without one word of kindness or commiseration for his suffering wife.

She comforted herself, on describing to her indignant husband all that had occurred, by the conviction that Maria would never know by what bitterness her poor little Constance had been assailed on the threshold of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

But alas! not a syllable had escaped the ear of Maria; and her first feeling, in her weak and depressed state, was a desire to die. The charm of her life was at an end. —

With renewed strength, however, came higher considerations. She remembered that she was not sent into the world for herself alone; and that the burthens appointed for her must be borne with meekness. If the illusions of life were over, its duties remained.

Should she die, what would become of her children, when left to the disposal of a father who measured every thing by its weight in gold? What would become of the heiress of Lynchcombe? — What of the feeble, portionless babe which had just struggled into light? —

To meet these grievous responsibilities, she must exert herself a thousandfold. Her married life had been disturbed by extremes of good and evil. She was no longer the rosy, trusting girl of Denny Cross, who could mistake the decaying leaves of autumn for gleams of sunshine: but a thoughtful woman; — a woman who, though reliant on divine protection, admitted that now her good Sophy, the guardian angel

of the house, was withdrawn to a home of her own, she must exert herself with double energy; as the swimmer, on losing his life-preserver, learns the use of his limbs.

Great as had been her suffering and peril, she recovered her strength on the present occasion sooner than she had ever done before; and was ready to accompany the husband whom she now obeyed as a duty rather than as a delight, wherever he pleased; to Lynchcombe, Harrals, the continent, or what the polite newspapers call a tour of visits; holding herself at his absolute disposal, that she might retain, in return, some influence over the destinies of his children.

Thus is it ever with despots. The growth of selfish wilfulness in their souls is fostered by the obsequiousness of those around them; as the lion is carefully fed by his keepers, lest he should turn and rend them.

Having deposited the children at Weymouth, the nearest bathing place to Lynchcombe, — for as yet Bournemouth was not, — Sir John insisted on making a tour of all the remarkable seats of the English aristocracy; for the ostensible purpose of culling features and ideas for the benefit of his Dorsetshire paradise. But Lady Wraysbury saw that, while talking only of Lynchcombe, he was thinking chiefly of Harrals; and that his mind was haunted by projects and visions

connected with the future Lord Fitz-Alwyne, who could scarcely yet run alone.

On leaving London, Sir John had turned a deaf ear to his wife's expression of a hope that before they returned to town, she might be indulged with a short visit to her old father and her sister Bessy. — Denny Cross was quite out of his line of march. Even when they approached it so near as Burleigh, — he assigned a long-existing engagement to Molyneux Castle, as a motive for delay.

"He was afraid Lord and Lady Dinton would be offended if it transpired that they had been so near, without fulfilling their promise."

To the Castle, therefore, they went. But its real attraction to Sir John Wraysbury consisted in being situated within ten miles of Harrals; the future family seat of the chimerical Woolstons, Lords Fitz-Alwyne.

The wandering couple could not have stumbled on a country visit more advantageous to all parties. — The motherly nature of the poor old Countess was comforting to the weak spirits of Lady Wraysbury; and the simplicity and ease of the establishment afforded a good lesson to Sir John; who was beginning to exhibit as much of the fussy ostentation of a *nouveau riche* as was compatible with his closeness of fist.

Had his sister and Gerald Molyneux been staying at the Castle, he might have felt less inclined for the visit. But a yachting friend had given them and their children a cast to Naples, where they were to spend the winter; and Lord Dinton's eldest son, Lord Wilchester, who was apt to absent himself so long as the brother who was so much finer a gentleman than himself, was quartered at the Castle, was now settled there for the autumn; a charming addition to its society.

In former days, when John Woolston of Harrals had been, during his long vacations, a frequent guest of the Dintons, and of course united in consequence, by the vulgar tongue of county gossip, to one of their daughters, there had been as much intimacy between the heirs-apparent of the two families, as is usually termed friendship. — But the sentiment must have been, in truth, of a flimsier quality. — For from the period of the Denny Cross match, when John Woolston slunk out of the society of his caste, no endeavour had been made by Lord Wilchester to find him out; whereas, had real friendship existed, it would have shone like a star, the brighter for surrounding darkness.

Mutual dissatisfaction had kept them apart. Either Lord Wilchester, who was devotedly attached to his sisters, fancied that Woolston had encouraged the partiality of Lady Mary after his affections and hand

were engaged to another; or he had detected, under a fair seeming, the selfishness of Woolston's nature; for his courtesies had never risen to their former level. — A little shy, — a little deaf, — his lordship's brusquerie and absence of mind often caused him to be accused of arrogance. He was pronounced to be, as people often are when there is no other fault to find with them, — a little *odd*. Whereas no man was ever more decidedly *even*, — in temper, temperament, and principle.

Insignificant in stature, there was nothing intellectual in his countenance. There seldom *is* in the countenance of a deaf man. And very often had he been humiliated, in early childhood, by the comparisons of the nursery, between his straight hair and meek deportment and the curly locks, buoyant spirits, and brilliant eyes of Master Gerald. — But if humbled, he was not envious; and though, in after-years, he became less fond of his handsome brother than of any other member of the family, it was not from any thing rather than jealousy of his superior qualifications.

Sir John Wraysbury met him, on his arrival at Molyneux Castle, with lively curiosity. Their relative positions were considerably altered by the ten years intervening since their last interview; and the surface of their natures had probably become a little honeycombed by the wear and tear of life.

But though his own was considerably more vibrant

and restless than in his Temple days, that of the Viscount appeared to be more than ever composed and sedate. — The only physical charm he had ever possessed, one of the sweetest of human voices, was now enhanced by a mild, reflective turn of countenance, which more than supplied the place of regularity of features; and though still reserved, his deportment had lost its awkward diffidence. The interim had evidently been spent in peace and quietness, though among people of the world.

But where? — Lord Wilchester's name was unenrolled in the lists of fashion. He had never entered a London ball-room since that first season in which the shy boy had been hunted down by ravenous mammas, in eager pursuit of *partis*. — He was seldom seen at an opera; — never, except as *chaperon* to his sisters. — He was not a systematic diner-out; nor was morning visiting in his nature. — Where, then, had his moral education been completed?

Simply, in parliament. Though some years the junior of Wraysbury, Lord Wilchester was now eight-and-thirty; and for more than a dozen years past, his attendance in the House of Commons had been as steady as that of the Speaker. Most young men are born with a military turn; a few lads incline towards the navy; and a few (prigs over their very pap-boat) aspire instinctively to a wig and gown and the woolsack. Lord Wilchester was born with a strong ten-

dency towards public life; and being exonerated by his auspicious position from official ambition, and conscious that his infirmity of deafness disqualified him as a placeman, he was content to be cited as the hardest-working member of the House.

A careful, candid, and intelligent listener, he seldom spoke; never, unless some point required immediate elucidation which no one else, present, was able or willing to elucidate. But his few sensible and opportune words were always listened to with respect; and many of the prosers who persecute the ear of the House, would have done well to take lesson by his brevity.

But from these habits of attention, arose habits of deduction. — The ever-reasoning mind became prompt of judgment. — The steam was always up; and the leading men of the day were unanimous in expressing their regret that Lord Wilchester did not come more prominently forward. They concluded that he was reserving himself for the Upper House.

He smiled, however, on learning from Sir John Wraysbury that Roger Farmer, for whom he was steady in his admiration and veneration, and with whom, in earlier years, he had become intimately acquainted in parliamentary committees, had expressed such an opinion.

"Few men give credit to another for remaining voluntarily in the background," — said he. "But

Farmer can afford to do so; — for in another class of life, *my* story is his own. — He preferred literature and his quiet chambers, to heated, noisy courts. *I* like domestic life. The Session serves as my recreation; as to some, their cigar, and to others, their stall at the Opera. As to being pinioned in Downing Street at this season of the year, nothing but an imperative sense of duty would determine me to give up the pleasure of free air and a sporting life. My services are luckily not in request. — 'Sparta hath many a worthier son than I.'"

Sir John endeavoured to make out a parallel case for himself, as a plea for keeping out of parliament: — in hopes, perhaps, that Lord Wilchester would express as strong an opinion as Farmer had done, that he owed it to himself and the country to write himself down M. P. For he seemed a little nettled when Lord Wilchester calmly replied, that *in his* place, he should probably exhibit the same reluctance.

"It is your happy privilege to restrict your sphere of usefulness to the duties of a county magistrate," he argued. — "But I, an hereditary legislator, am forced to learn my A, B, C, by working my way from the shell to the fifth form."

Poor Wraysbury, who fancied that his dormant claim to the barony of Fitz-Alwyne was familiar to all the world, or at least to his own county, had hardly patience to be thus quietly put down. But he

saw that the offence was inadvertent; and that Lord Wilchester thought no more of his coronet than if it had been a cotton night-cap.

Lady Wraysbury, meanwhile, had seldom found herself happier than under the roof of the Dintons. — The homely kindness of the Countess, the gentle manners of the sensible, sociable daughters, afforded a charming contrast to the habits of Groby Abbey; which was a flagrant specimen of fashionable London, — *plus* a French flower-garden and patent billiard-table, — *minus* the perpetual change and illusion which converts bits of worthless glass into a gay kaleidoscope. — Over their cheerful work-table, Lady Dinton talked to her of her children; and Lady Mary and Lady Jemima of those of Emma, which seemed to be dearly loved and missed at the Castle. — She fancied, indeed, that it was for Emma's sake they took so much interest in her and the nursery to which she was longing to return. It would have been difficult to convince her of their sincere regret that Gerald had not chosen a wife a few miles nearer home than Harrals.

But she soon found that the absence from England of Emma and her husband was regarded in the family as a relief. The Gerald Molyneuxes required such a round of excitement, — such a change of visitors. Display was a portion of their existence. They could not live without an audience.

"My father is getting old," said Lady Mary, one day when her mother was out of the room, — "and a constant succession of company wearies him. But Gerald and Emma become almost ill of ennui, when we are, as now, a family party."

"But papa is not the only one to whom their passion for a crowded dinner-table and blaze of lights is insupportable," added Lady Jemima. "For the last two winters, Wilchester has wholly absented himself from the Castle. My father has given him a shooting-box in Bedfordshire, where he is privileged to lead a more peaceable life."

"I don't think, however, that he would have obtained Havermead during my father's lifetime," interposed Lady Mary, "had it been supposed he would so often escape to it from the racket created here by Mrs. Molyneux's passion for society."

"Is it quite fair," pleaded Lady Wraysbury, "to rest the whole blame upon Emma? — At Harrals she led a very quiet life" —

"Too quiet, perhaps" —

"And it is only since she became your brother's wife, that she adopted her present habits of dissipation and expense."

"Too true, I am afraid!" was the candid reply. "But I fear it was similarity of taste that brought them together."

"More likely that she adopted those of the man

she loved," — persisted Maria. — "I have seen as striking an example of it, lately, in my own family. A sister of mine, the least studious among us, having married a book-worm, is now never happy out of a library; while my sister Bessy, so devoted to my father that she never quits Denny Cross, will probably settle when she loses him, as the wife of some Northamptonshire squire, and forget that she was ever fond of a book."

"But how came it that Mr. Farmer did not prefer the bookish sister?" — inquired Jemima, much interested by her frankness.

"He never saw her till he had fallen in love with Sophy, who was on a visit to us in town: — luckily, perhaps, — for Bessy would not have married a man so much older than herself."

"I was not aware, my dear Lady Wraysbury," interposed Lady Dinton, who had joined the circle, "that you had a sister still unmarried, or I should have invited her to meet you here."

Maria replied gratefully; but assured her that no invitation, however tempting, would induce her to quit Denny Cross, even for a day. "Bessy was her father's constant companion and attendant."

"Then we must have endeavoured to persuade Mr. Pennington to bear her company."

"My father has never left home since my mother's

death," replied Maria; "not even to visit one of his children."

And Lady Dinton, accustomed to see "nice customs curtsey to great kings," could not but respect the humble family which, amid the strifes and inroads of the world, preserved habits and opinions of its own.

"At all events," said she, "as you are to spend a few days at Denny Cross after leaving us, you must allow us to drive over during your visit, and make acquaintance with another member of a family with whom we are proud to be connected."

Maria, remembering that, in her youth, Molyneux Castle was always spoken of by their fireside as a grand place, situated in a distant part of the county, was almost prompted by her pony-chaise view of time and space, to suggest the distance intervening. But the recollection of all she had been enabled to accomplish by Lord Dinton's fine set of horses, satisfied her that she must submit to have the quiet of poor old Denny Cross interrupted by an incursion of coronets.

While this was passing, Sir John Wraysbury had been accomplishing a hurried visit to Harrals. — No spot in the united kingdom was more distasteful to him than the house of his fathers; where his neighbours, rich and poor, conspired in the idea that he was defrauding them of their right to participate in his monstrous wealth: — the rich, resenting the closing up of the old house, to whose hospitalities they felt

entitled: — the poor, looking in vain for even the crumbs that ought to fall from a rich man's table. — Every soul in the parish was aware that Sir John Woolston Wraysbury of Harrals was one of the most opulent men in the three kingdoms. Yet he did even less for them than had been done by his penurious father; except that such farms as had fallen into his hands, were progressively placed in order, with a view to more advantageous letting.

Instead of making his appearance, as the villagers expected, in "a coach and six," according to traditions of old Sir Bernard, his grandfather, — or even in a coach and four, as the elders of the place remembered to have seen Sir Harry and my lady, — Sir John came stealing upon them once or twice a-year, in a fly; — to confer with the steward about the minimum of repairs necessary to secure the safety of that portion of the house where the family pictures and a few old cabinets were deposited, under his keeping; the rest of the time-worn mansion being allowed to stand or tumble, as it listed.

For Sir John, though his son and heir was nearly two years old, still delayed laying the foundation stone of the projected residence, the erection of which was to encroach further on an income so narrowed by the overgrown proportions of Lynchcombe. — The interest of the large sum bequeathed by Lady Woolston being absorbed by the restoration of his di-

lapidated farms, he had resolved, with the doggedness which was one of his characteristics, that not a stone of the new house should be laid, till the aggregate of three years of the Harrals' rent roll secured the means of its completion. — He would not fall into the same error there, as at Lynchcombe. He would create only such an abode for the future Sir Harry as might be creditably kept up on an income of eight thousand a-year.

But though prudence predominated over his designs and estimates, and warned him still to defer that first clash of brick and trowel, as awful to an experienced ear as the first fire from the trenches of a besieged fortress, the demoralized aspect of the old place produced as much emotion in his heart, as it is easy to create in that of a great capitalist, otherwise than by the fall of the twentieth part of a fraction in the public funds.

It was the period of the year most favourable to the beauties of the spot. — The beechwoods, tinged with amber by the early frosts, formed an appropriate background to the old pile; and the Virginian clematis, which crimsoned the venerable walls, reduced their complexion, by comparison, to a milder hue. The fading year, in short, was in unison with the falling house.

There was something mournful too in the one old hound that went limping about the premises; the last

relic of its better days. Grass and weeds encumbered the stable-yard. The branches of the long unpruned fig-tree in the corner, straggled out like feelers seeking to attach themselves to the rare visitant. — Well did Sir John remember the delight of rushing to that spot, on his half-yearly emancipation from the heavy scholarship of Rugby; — the sieve hastily held out to his pony and pigeons; and the glee with which he used to be greeted by both them and the old iron-grey coachman, who never failed to announce to "Marser Woolson," that he was "growing, Sir, growing like a little weed."

His conscience, feeble as it was becoming, almost smote him, that he had so thoroughly abandoned that once-loved home. But was it his fault? — Had he not been banished by his father from his gates, till the tie between him and Harrals was rent asunder? — "Alas! no," — whispered the inward monitor — "Your own temper, and not your father's, pronounced your sentence of exile." And following up his self-recriminations, he was almost inclined to admit that it would have been better for all parties had he submitted from the first to parental authority. The old baronet, who knew the world, had wisely foreseen that he required a wife of stronger character, and more extended connexions, than Maria Pennington of Denny Cross.

While wading through the dead leaves of the old

shrubbery, on whose gravel walks he had first resolved to brave the opposition of his family, and complete his engagement, — though he rendered justice to her good qualities, as an amiable, inoffensive woman, who dearly loved her children, and scrupulously obeyed her husband, — he felt that a wife of higher energies would have been better suited to his fortunes. Her gentle insignificance was out of proportion with those of Lynchcombe; and at Groby Abbey, she became suddenly a pigmy. Even in the humdrum circle at Molyneux Castle, it required all the cordiality of that kindly-affectioned family to raise her to their level.

As Farmer had originally predicted, the instability of John Woolston's character was becoming more and more apparent in Sir John Wraysbury; and what was worse, nothing but his calculating turn of mind, kept in subjection the spirit of ostentation struggling within him; which, like Alonzo's spectre in the Castle of Otranto, threatened to grow too large for the fabric, and crumble it to ruins. An effect, perhaps, of the combination of Woolston and Wraysbury blood: — the Liverpool compting house and old hall at Harrals were at variance in his nature. The idiosyncrasies of the ancient baronet and the modern drysalter, created an antagonism.

As regarded himself, the mischief was irremediable. By his accession of wealth, his character had been in-

delibly stamped with worldliness; which, though it could work no change in his ungifted and obscure wife, was likely to exercise a fatal influence over his daughter. — Unless another son should be born to him, which the delicacy of Lady Wraysbury's health rendered improbable, that quiet little girl, into whose ears Miss Avesford was infusing the leperous distilment of universal knowledge, yet whose ideas of supreme indulgence consisted in a week's holidays at Denny Cross, spent in rambling with grandpapa about his farm, or with aunt Bessy among her poultry, would become the richest heiress in the kingdom. — "The heiress of Lynchcombe," she would probably be called. She might live to be created — (who knows? — such things have been seen in this our money-worshipping kingdom,) — Baroness Lynchcombe, of that ilk. But even those who hailed her by that title, even the government from which it might be extorted by the territorial influence of the family, would never realize, as he did, the extent of the heterogeneous property amassed by old Adam: — the foreign investments, the colonial speculations, which seemed to increase and multiply beyond computation, in their native dirt, — like the swarming population of Saffron Hill.

"Ten years hence, that poor child, whom her nursemaid had formerly declared she was ashamed to walk with, at Ramsgate, because her bonnet was so shabby, will perhaps be courted by the Duchess of

Groby for one of her sons," mused the millionary. — "For they may talk of the manœuvring of fine-lady mammas to marry their daughters: heiress-hunting, for their sons, has become quite as shameless a pursuit. And between my poor wife's supineness and hopeless ignorance of the world, Netta's brilliant prospects in life will probably be marred, unless I contrive to establish an early influence over her mind. — It is a great duty; — a very serious responsibility! — I remember the time when I should have consulted Farmer whether to keep her young will in subjection to those older and wiser than herself; or whether to strengthen it into higher energies of independence. — But Farmer's foolish marriage has immensely lowered his judgment in my estimation. Better wait till the dear child's character begins to develope itself. — On one point, however, I am quite decided. Neither Maria's family nor my own shall obtain the smallest control over her. — I could see by Harpsden's manner this morning, when I was examining, in Harrals church, the newly-erected monument to my father and mother, that he is prepared to eat any amount of dirt, to reinstate himself on friendly terms with the family; and the Gerald Molyneuxes and Wroughtons are incessantly besieging me with letters, such as people usually address to the first Lord of the Treasury. — But it won't do. — My heart has become as chill towards them as they were cold to *us* in our misery at Maple Hill; and should I

obtain the parliamentary interest they predict and desire, it will not be exercised, I can tell them, to provide for those who would never have stirred one finger in my behalf! — In my boyhood, my father allowed my sisters to tyrannize over me. — Later in life, they fancied it their interest to show me the cold shoulder. They will find that nature's laws are not to be outraged with impunity."

CHAPTER XVII.

If Emma Molyneux or her husband ever wrote from Naples to claim assistance from their wealthy brother, their establishment in that brilliant city certainly exhibited no want of comfort either real or artificial. Never had they been so well provided for. Adam Wraysbury's legacy had been turned to thrifty account; and Lord Dinton had not only taken the education of their eldest boy off their hands, by placing his grandson at Harrow, but Lord Wilchester's suggestion that some addition to his brother's income might enable the pleasure-loving couple, whose habits were so little consonant with the family taste, to enjoy the winter in Italy for which they had long been pining, and leave Molyneux Castle to the sober tenor of its way, had caused the credit of the Honourable Gerald at his banker's to be increased by a few hundred pounds; — as a troublesome member of the Upper House is occasionally provided for by an embassy.

And thus the arrangement which rendered the fireside at the Castle so cozy and sociable, supplied another pleasant lounge to the privileged idlers of Naples. And in few cities of Europe is idleness a

pleasanter thing. — No one is ashamed of it, because, there, nothing seems in earnest. Even Vesuvius looks more like the decoration of a ballet than an eternal engine of destruction. Forsyth truly observes, "If Naples' be a paradise inhabited by devils, certainly they are merry devils." Every winter the frivolities of fashion re-blossom in that genial atmosphere, as surely as the orange-trees in spring; and neither war nor cholera, — neither revolution nor fanaticism, — suffice to silence the jingling bells of the bauble of folly. The climate and its creations appeal too deliciously to the senses to allow the rougher experiences of life their proper influence.

Among the lovers of music, masquerading, and maccaroni, — among the aristocratic invalids endeavouring by private theatricals, and crowded balls, to moderate the beat of a feverish pulse, — gay, thoughtless people, like the Gerald Molyneuxes, were hailed with a ready welcome. — St. Marcel, the French Secretary of Legation, declared that they were the lightest in hand of any English savages with whom he had ever horded; and Lord Frederick Hill, a callow attaché, who, as a younger son of the Duke of Groby, was much petted by his fellow-countrymen, was seldom out of the house.

One sunny morning in February, when, after bringing them a packet of letters, arrived from England in the diplomatic bag, he was receiving his postage dues

from Mrs. Molyneux, in the form of a bunch of the sweetest double violets in the world, they were startled by a burst of laughter, followed by a scarcely-repressed oath, from Gerald, already deep in his letters.

"By Jove!" cried he, "even in this age of miracles, it is hardly to be believed! — I don't suppose any parents ever took half as much pains to educate a child, as I have done to bring up my governor and his domestic calamities, — (as Emma and I have named the rest of the family). But in spite of all my trouble, they go backwarder and backwarder, and become slower and slower, every year."

"What is the matter?" — inquired Mrs. Molyneux; while Lord Frederick, not very ready of apprehension, felt uncertain whether the indignation of his friend were real or assumed.

"In Wilchester," continued Gerald, pursuing his running commentary on the letter in his hand, "there was always an innate tendency towards the snob. But I *did* hope we had lived enough at the Castle to produce a little improvement in my sisters. And after all, in England nearly as much as in America, it is the young ladies of a house who assign its tone and *cachet*."

"Not in ours, I promise you," rejoined Lord Frederick. "*My* sisters are never allowed to open their lips till they are married; — the reason, perhaps, why they never close them afterwards."

"But what have Jemima and Mary been doing to offend you?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux of her husband, still assorting the violets.

"Picking up all sorts of atrocious acquaintances."

"Such as —"

"Your brother and Lady Wraysbury have been on a visit at the Castle —"

"And are now at Groby Abbey, as my morning's letters inform me," added Lord Frederick, a little shocked at the ill-breeding of his friend, and unaware that the sentiments of his friend's wife were scarcely more delicate than those of her husband.

"And at Lady Wraysbury's instance, of course, my mother and the girls have been over to Denny Cross; and Jemima has the audacity to tell me that 'dear Willy,' as she always calls my prig of a brother, appears 'much struck with Bessy Pennington.' — The idea of one of our family so much as knowing the christian name of one of those people! I should as soon think of being 'struck' by a dairy-maid."

"That was nearly what my father said to John, when he proposed to Maria," said Mrs. Molyneux, with an air of consternation. "But it did not prevent the marriage."

"The *marriage?* — Why, you surely do not fancy even Wilchester such a muff as to be capable of — But, no, no! — I can't believe it. — I wouldn't believe it, if I saw the special license. — Though he

pretends to have surveyed mankind from China to Peru, — from Australia to California, — scrutinizing those nearest to him through a microscope, and those afar off through Lord Rosse's telescope, so that, being so wondrous wise in his own conceit, no man is so likely to be made a dupe, — I cannot think he would extinguish the family in that horrible quagmire at Denny Cross."

"How old is your brother?" inquired Lord Frederick, amazed at this outburst on the part of a man so systematically composed as Molyneux. "He was before my time; and our *chef* is too many years ahead of sixty, to allow a peerage in the House."

"Wilchester? — In his fortieth year, or thereabouts."

"Long past his first childhood, in short, and at a considerable distance from his second! — I think you are pretty safe. Though this is a dangerous moment in England, for bachelors, old or young. People get horribly domestic about Christmas time; especially in the Midland counties. — Candlelight, or rather owl-light, before dinner, is a trying ordeal for tender hearts. — I trust, for your sake, Gerald, that the people at Denny Cross dine early."

"*Dine!*" ejaculated Gerald, mentally glancing at the sort of beef-and-dumpling meal that probably passed under the name of dinner with the Penningtons — "I vow to Heaven, Emma," added he, turning

suddenly towards his wife, "I am almost sorry I agreed to leave Edgar in England. Those people will make a ploughboy of him. He knows more of the world already, than his Blue-bookish uncle and Mrs. Goodchild aunts. — But all the further good he gains at Harrow will be negatived, if he is to spend the holidays with a set of mik-and-water old maids."

"Skim-milk and muddy-water, too, by your own account," interrupted Lord Frederick, who hated to see the affairs of life taken so much in earnest. "But don't cry out so lustily, my dear Gerald, before you're hurt. Always time enough for a grievance. — So put your letters where I have derived much cheerfulness from thrusting my Christmas bills, — into the stove; and tell me what answer I am to give to Luigi about your bay mare?"

Right glad was Mrs. Molyneux when this inquiry led the way to one of those horseflesh discussions, which had long initiated her into the language of the stable and tricks of the turf; and finally, relieved her from their company. For though conjugal experience of the impolicy of stimulating the wrath of an angry man, had silenced her acknowledgment of being ten times more alarmed than her husband by the contents of Lady Jemima's letter, she remembered only too well how many of their Northamptonshire neighbours had remarked, at the time of her brother's unsatis-

factory marriage with Maria Pennington, that they should have been far less surprised had Mr. Woolston waited till the younger sister grew up; for that Bessy was the prettiest little creature in the world.

What she had since become, Mrs. Molyneux had as little troubled herself to inquire, as whether the celebrated cattle for which annual prizes were decreed to Denny Cross were of the Devon or Durham breed. — And to whom could she now address herself for information? — To Molyneux Castle, she must not betray her anxiety. With her brother-in-law Harpsden, since the death of poor Carry, she had entertained no correspondence; and from the moment of her marriage, Gerald had discouraged all intimacy with missish country neighbours. It was therefore difficult to ascertain to what extent the prospects of her son might be endangered by Lord Wilchester's barn-yard propensities.

"So true, what Gerald remarked at the time of my brother's wretched match," mused Mrs. Molyneux, as she fixed her vacant gaze upon those bright blue waters of the Bay, which might have inspired less mundane reflections; "so true that every downward step made by a family in such connexions, entails others still lower, and lower, and lower. — There is always a descending tendency. I remember thinking that though the match was certainly a poor one for John, my father and Gerald made too much fuss about

its disadvantages. — But men are the best judges of such matters. Their knowledge of the world gets brightened up at their clubs, by the give and take of perpetual discussion; just as the Americans become so much readier in business and prompter in talk, through the habit of frequenting taverns and boarding-houses, than the shy English, brought up on the silent system. But all this does not help me to a knowledge of the truth. And alas! how much of our brilliant position in society do we not owe to the general persuasion, that Wilchester will never marry, and that Edgar is sure of the Dinton title and estates!"

Had not the delights of the Carnival been just then at their zenith, and the minds of the two selfish triflers whirled into giddiness and forgetfulness in the vortex of pleasure, their alarms might, perhaps, have prompted them to attempt, in the family correspondence, one of those delicate investigations, so apt to produce the mischiefs they deprecate. — But they were too full of themselves to speculate very eagerly for Edgar; and as Lady Jemima's next letter contained no domestic news more interesting than the fall from a ladder of a mason who was repairing one of the chimnies of the castle, without further allusion to "dear Willy" than that he had given a ten-pound note to the family of the sufferer, there was reason to hope that the tardily incubated Cupids of the future

head of the House, had been addled ere they broke the shell.

Could Gerald Molyneux have surmised the true state of the case, his amazement would probably have exceeded even his disgust. That the daughter of a squire without a lodge to his paddock, or enough dictionary proficiency to regulate the amount of his ps and qs, should have presumed to decline the hand of a brother of *his*, would have indeed astonished him. Leaving out of the question that the heir-apparent of the Earldom of Dinton, and its noble estates, was a man of tolerable appearance, good understanding, excellent temper, and unblemished reputation, he would have felt that a Bessy Pennington ought to have learned from the Wraysburys the respect due to so near a relative of one of the constituted authorities of the Upper Two Thousand represented in his own person.

But of the singular *dénouement* of this short but very sweet acquaintance, nothing had transpired. The very affinities of character which had drawn them together, forbad them to seek counsel or confide to idle ears the strength or weakness of their hearts. — Though Lord Wilchester's intimacy with the squire's daughter had arisen during her sister's sojourn at Denny Cross, and under the very eyes of Lady Wraysbury, his visits had been carefully accounted for, by messages brought from Lady Jemima or Lady

Mary; and poor Maria was much too happily occupied in wading through the snow with her father, or taking bleak drives with him in a pony chaise without springs, to take much heed of the comings and goings of the deaf Viscount.

"Lady Dinton was so kind, — so very kind to send her the knitting-bag she had promised. But she was afraid it inconvenienced him very much to ride over about such a trifle. It might have been sent by the post, or the carrier; or been forwarded through the porter at Harrals."

From the chaperonship of such a woman, even the inexperienced old bachelor felt that he had nothing to fear. — So he managed to call daily during the happy week enjoyed by Lady Wraysbury in the bosom of her family; and on the day she left them, came naturally enough to dry the tears of Bessy. What more he said and did, need not be further insisted upon, than that his utmost efforts made no impression in his favour. — It was not that he was too old, — too plain, — too hurried in his courtship. Bessy simply assured him, as she had assured others before him, that nothing would induce her to quit her father. Such was her duty — such her pleasure.

The gray-headed squire had numbered four-score years; and was beginning to be a little ailing in body, and more than a little failing in mind. She must stay and watch over him. — She had ever been his pet and

darling, — his favoured, if not favourite, child. — Scarcely two years old when her mother died, she had been established on his knee upon the day of the funeral, to afford him such consolation as could be derived from the face that was likest to his dead wife's. And it was therefore he had always loved her better than Sophy or Maria.

Against such a statement, what was to be argued? — Lord Wilchester proposed that the old squire, with his rush-bottomed arm-chair, and India-rubber clogs, should remove with them to Havermead, his cheerful Bedfordshire home.

"You cannot mean it?" said Bessy; — not startled by views so liberal, but shocked that any one should fancy that another hearthstone, or another bed and pillow, could ever be to her father as those of Denny Cross; where he first saw the light, and was prepared humbly and gratefully to close his eyes for ever. — His corner in the pew in church, — the place in the hall where he was accustomed to hang up his turnip-hoe, — the ledge in the study where his dog's-eared almanack was deposited, — the old crooked roller-blind he had so often mended, — the great oak table where his wife's coffin had rested before it was carried out to the grave, — all these familiar things, the *lares* and *penates* of poor old Denny Cross, were sacred, — were irreplaceable! — Lord Wilchester might have offered to inaugurate her, at once, under the roof of

his parents, and it would have made no difference. The Castle would have been equally strange to the poor old squire. — The Castle would not have been home. —

At length, though something loth, he modified his offer into a proposal to reside with them at Denny Cross.

"And my brother Hugh?" — was the smiling reply; "whose dominion is absolute over the place, now that his father's intellect is beginning to waver; and who would not like his hours and habits to be interfered with by a stranger. Even Mr. Farmer's visit of a fortnight proved irksome to him; and though Maria fretted sadly at being away from her husband, she was glad, when she saw how little her brother liked to be thwarted, that Sir John had allowed her to come alone."

In short, do what the devoted Viscount would, or sacrifice what he might, Bessy was inexorable. Her place was appointed unto her. Her duties were appointed unto her. And neither might be changed. But while she steadily explained her views with none of the faltering of a startled girl, but with the gentleness of a woman firm in her consciousness of right, she looked so pretty, so mild, so feminine, — so charming a dimple hovered, every now and then, like a passing shadow, over her short upper lip, and so gracefully did her figure in its plain-made gown of dark merino hang over her work while she sat talking, that

Lord Wilchester bent earnestly towards her to catch her faintest whispers; and having heard and promised to submit, resolved to wait patiently for the death of that fortunate old squire, even if he lived to be a centenarian.

He went his way, a rejected man; not a humiliated. Bessy had sued for the secrecy respecting their explanation which she voluntarily undertook to observe. It was unnecessary to inform him, — it might have created false hopes, — that she was afraid of exposing herself to the solicitations in his favour of her brothers and sisters; — not because she mistrusted her own stability of purpose; — but because she dreaded the contentions of a family-congress.

Such was the woman to whom — on the return of his wife to her family, little suspecting what was occurring in the homely parlour she left behind — Sir John Wraysbury saw fit to refuse the company of Netta, for the week's holiday anxiously petitioned for by Bessy.

"The little girl was getting too old for Denny Cross," he observed. "At her present age vulgar ideas and habits were more easily contracted than got rid of."

Though deeply hurt, Lady Wraysbury ventured to persist in her request. Her old father had made such a point of seeing once more his first and only grandchild, — named too, at his request, after his wife! —

"If Sir John were afraid of Janetta having too much liberty, and being allowed to romp as she used when a child, Miss Avesford would accompany her."

"Miss Avesford? — Worse and worse! — what would Miss Avesford think and report of the habits of Denny Cross; — her brother keeping up a conversation all dinner-time with the half-doting old man-servant, and of the pudding served with the meat? — Impossible, — quite impossible!" —

Maria was too self-governed to reply that, only a few years before, these things had passed unnoticed by himself; and that if Miss Avesford noted them with disrespect, she was no fit governess for Janetta; for never, in the course of her married life, had she irritated him by a bitter rejoinder. — She merely observed, after a pause, in a somewhat tremulous voice, —

"You would do me a great favour, Sir John, — a great *kindness*, my dear John, — by allowing, for this once, the child to go. If not, my father will be sadly disappointed; and it is perhaps the last year he may be alive to make the request."

But her dear John replied only by a significant negative gesture; and quitted the room, to evade further expostulation. Having made up his mind as doggedly as on that memorable July afternoon in the old eating-room at Harrals, he went his way, to squabble with bricklayers, and tyrannize over carvers and gilders;

wondering within himself, whether Lady Wraysbury would ever be made to enter into her new position in life, or understand the importance of every new step and association concerning a daughter destined to be the richest heiress in the kingdom.

Poor child! — Poor little Netta! — She half cried her eyes out, that afternoon, on learning that her dream was not to be realized of one more visit to dear grandpapa and dearest aunt Bessy. — To her, Denny Cross, and the rabbit-warren, were far finer things than Harrals or Lynchcombe.

Poor child! — Poor little Netta! — Those tears were but as a summer shower compared with the tempests likely to beset her, or the hardships of an heiress. — Sir John could have already told her, — for he had made the calculation, — how many hundreds of golden sovereigns per day, or how many thousands per year, would eventually fall to her disposal. — But to have calculated how many anxious hours, and hopes defeated, would probably embitter this overweening affluence, was as little in his nature as to conceive that there was as much vulgarity in his purse-proud fastidiousness, as in any custom, observed or omitted, by the simple inhabitants of Denny Cross.

CHAPTER XVIII.

After a separation of six long years, dear reader, we greet you well; trusting you will bear us no ill-will for sparing you the epoch of school-rooms and back-boards, to which you may have been loathingly looking forward. — For though the shooting of the young idea is said to afford a delightful task to instructors, its uncertain growth, amidst weeds and nettles, is far from a pleasant subject of contemplation.

One point, indeed, of Janetta's progress towards womanhood, afforded a spectacle to which no one could object: — She grew up remarkably pretty. — While Lynchcombe Hall advanced in majestic whiteness from basement to the crowning balustrade, little Netta became Miss Wraysbury, and a beauty.

A few envious neighbours, when they found that the merry boy still in the lower school at Eton had no claim upon the Dorsetshire property, were of opinion that her lovely countenance was a gift of supererogation that would better have become her younger sister, whose features were homely, and whose constitution frail. — But they saw her but rarely to make the comparison; for when, two years after her last visit to Denny Cross, Lady Wraysbury died in giving

birth to a dead son, the Farmers, without progeny of their own, had, without much difficulty, obtained from Sir John the gift of little Constance. The shrewd eyes of old Roger having readily discovered that the little ailing girl, the only unportioned one of the family, was somewhat of an incumbrance to the widower, he proposed to adopt her as his own.

A man who, like Sir John, measured human beings, and sub-divided life and its business, exclusively by the letters L. S. D., (esteeming those who were catalogued under the letter D. at a three hundred-fold lower rate than those distinguished by the letter L.,) would, in fact, have been somewhat puzzled to estimate by the same rule and measure the future owner of millions, and the Cinderella fated to become her dependent: and it seemed better for all their sakes that Constance should grow up out of sight of the luxury in which she had neither part nor prospect.

And thus was poor Netta deprived of one of the surest aids to education: the companionship and sympathy of kindred blood. — She was fated indeed to be wholly alone in her glory. Her father, keenly alive to the dangers of propinquity between governesses and tutors, — those unhappy Parias naturally inclining towards each other, — had established the school-room of his son and daughter in different wings of his colossal mansion; and every body noticed that

after the departure of little Nonny, Miss Wraysbury lost not only much of her cheerfulness, but much of her softness of deportment.

The gentleness of her mother, so long as she lived, had fostered the germ of tenderness in her heart; and she yearned towards Denny Cross and her aunts, as the sunny memories of her childhood. — But after Lady Wraysbury's death, estranged from all intercourse with her mother's family, and reduced to formal interviews with her boy-brother, there was much danger that she might become as cold as her preceptress, and as calculating as her father.

For Miss Avesford was a person who unluckily knew everything, and felt nothing. — An orphan, trained from the time she could spell in a public institution for the education of education-mongers, she had been taught all that could be learned by books or rote; but utterly estranged from that better schooling of the heart, spontaneously imbibed in the charitable atmosphere of a loving home. In moral deportment and superficial piety, no one could be better drilled: and few women were more qualified to prose down the most learned of learned Pundits in Crichtonian argument. But she was capable of greater wonders than this. — When undergoing, at half-yearly examinations, the cross-questioning of education-crazed Duchesses and Right Honourable Ladyships, she had obtained medals and premiums at their hands, without

leading them to suppose she had discovered their own utter ignorance of all in which they affected to instruct her.

But learning so various, and even tact so nice, were not the endowments chiefly wanted in the education of a motherless girl. Though the conduct of Miss Avesford was unexceptionable, — so much so, indeed, that the model of propriety was secretly accused by Mrs. Dysart, the stately housekeeper at Lynchcombe, of aspiring to the hand as well as confidence of the father of her pupil, — she had obtained no real influence over Janetta.

Nor was the clarifier of apricots and tyrant of spider-brushers justified in her dread of having Miss Avesford, or a Miss Anything else, set in authority over her. Sir John Wraysbury was the last man on earth to encumber himself again with a wife. — The careful administration of his fortune was too circumstantially pursued, to leave leisure for those yearnings after mutual affection, which lead the way to marriage. Nor would the birth of a new son afford a new heir to Lynchcombe. The Wraysbury property being bequeathed exclusively to the children of his marriage with Maria, the daughter of Richard Pennington, of Denny Cross, he might have as many male offspring as King Priam, and still Netta would remain his heiress.

Lynchcombe and Harrals therefore became the pets

of Sir John; as craving, alas! in their nature, as the daughters of the horseleech. By degrees, he seemed to care more of his two children as the future possessors of his two estates, than of the estates as the inheritance of his children. As to the professed governess, he looked upon her like a chaff-cutter or bone-mill on his farms; a domestic machine, which received three hundred per annum to operate upon the raw material of his daughter's mind; and which, after carding and weaving, and smoothing the raw material into fine broad-cloth, was to go and card, and weave, and smooth other wool of the first quality, elsewhere. He respected her, indeed, not only because she was sedate and unobtrusive, but because she had once consulted him about the investment of her savings; and seemed to understand the mysteries of the Stock Exchange almost as clearly as those of syntax.

The secretive, or, as *he* called it, prudential nature of the man, rendered it meanwhile a matter of much comfort to Sir John Wraysbury, that, while the rent-rolls of the Dukes of Groby and Earls of Dinton were as familiar to the public as the price of railway shares, the amount of *his* fortune, and the exact terms of his tenure, were known only to himself and his lawyers. "Enormously rich," or "millionary," were epithets generally applied to him. Reckless guessers declared that he had come into four or five millions, and enjoyed more than a hundred thousand a-year. Envious

neighbours persisted, on the contrary, that his income was enormously over-rated, and that the bulk of old Wraysbury's fortune had devolved upon his nephews of the Liverpool firm; and many a prying investigator hinted that he was coining dollars from his American speculations; and that his dock property alone advanced every year in steady progression at the rate of five thousand per annum.

Though the world naturally concluded that, as in the ordinary course of things, this wondrous wealth was to descend to the son and heir of Sir John, a few persisted in asserting that Miss Wraysbury was the heiress. Even those who took the middle course, and fancied that it was to be shared between them, decided that the demure little girl at Lynchcombe was to have a million or two for her portion. It was only a very spiteful family, residing as near to the Wraysburys as the sweeping nature of their property would allow, who declared that Miss Wraysbury was wholly dependent on her father; who, having married a person of low extraction, without settlements, could cut off his daughter with a shilling if she disobliged him by an unsuitable choice.

It was by these *frondeurs*, the Grandisons of Blandhurst, that the governess antipathies and prohibitions of Miss Avesford were chiefly drawn forth; and Sir John himself cherished against them the sentiments usually created between near country neighbours by

the feuds of bailiffs and game-keepers, and the tale-bearing of the parsonage.

The Grandisons had, however, more pretext for their enmity to Lynchcombe than could be pleaded by Sir John. For the last half century, their house had been the great house of the neighbourhood. Thanks to the decay and absenteeism of the Latimers, Blandhurst had risen in importance, till, on the marriage and establishment of the present Mr. and Mrs. Grandison, the handsome fortune of the bride enabled them to compete with the first households in the county. — A well-furnished house, well-distributed grounds, and a well-stocked manor, afforded them the pleasantest elements of country life. Even when the up-growing of several children created inroads upon their income, they made a considerable show in the hospitalities of the neighbourhood. Mr. Grandison of Blandhurst's year of high shrievalty was still a memorable epoch in the chronicle of county splendours.

But this was when the poor old house at Lynchcombe was perishing of a rapid decline: — no smoke rising from its chimnies, — no chariots or horsemen issuing from its gates: — when it was a dead letter, — a blank, — a blemish to the neighbourhood. — And when the new mansion began to expand its wings, like a butterfly bursting from its chrysalis, and the glass domes of new conservatories, and arcades of aviaries were seen glistening among the ancient cedars,

the Grandisons grew angry at the interest and curiosity excited around them by people whom, because their fortune came from Liverpool and their family stock from a distant county, they chose to regard as *parvenus*.

They disliked the new-comers all the more when this imputation was disproved, and the Wraysburys were inaugurated into their rightful position among the county thrones and dominions. — The untimely death of Lady Wraysbury, a few months after the establishment of the family in their new abode, created, indeed, the strongest interest in favour of her husband and children; and for some time, Blandhurst did not venture to raise its voice in disparagement. — But no sooner was the achievement removed from the house, and its doors opened, than they began to point out in a whisper the bad taste displayed in this wonderful new and illustrated edition of "poor old Lynchcombe." They were the first to stigmatize it by the name of Aladdin's Palace.

Taste is a thing at once so arbitrary and so shifting, and has unluckily become of late years so prevailing an epidemic, that to endeavour to set up a standard or enact laws for its better regulation, is like attempting to make ropes of sand, or daguerreotype the sky. — But every one but Mrs. Grandison and her fastidious daughters applauded that beautiful Elisabethan house, with its richly-carved furniture, damask

hangings and costly cabinets; its groined ceilings and inlaid floors; — even apart from the commanding beauty of its site, and the recent thinning out of the adjoining plantations, to admit enlivening glimmerings of the sea. — Adam Wraysbury's pictures and statues appeared to advantage in its well-proportioned gallery; and except by those to whom the gloss of novelty is an offence, and who would probably have found fault with the Garden of Eden because the trunks of the trees were not mossy or the avenues sufficiently venerable, the new seat was pronounced to be an ornament to the county, and one of the most charming residences in the kingdom.

In describing the family at Blandhurst, as "the Grandisons," an especial exception should have been made of the head of the house; who was understood in the neighbourhood to entertain a very small share in the sayings and doings of his home circle. Having formed an early marriage at the instigation of worldly-minded parents, who considered the wealth of his bride a certificate of universal merit, he had soon discovered that her smiling face was a mask; that her understanding was narrow, and her power of mischief extensive. — But Mr. Grandison was too much of a philosopher to resent against her the faults previously overlooked, or to punish himself by a life of fretfulness for a youthful blunder. He made no complaints, — he displayed no disgusts; but withdrew, as far as

the decorum of life would admit, from her society; affording himself perpetual occupation by improving his estate; and taking refuge in his library and workshop, — his business as a magistrate, and pastime as a sportsman. — There was no occasion because he was yoked with an infirm temper, to ruffle his own.

He had consequently passed through life cheerfully and creditably; instead of worrying himself, and diverting the public with scenes of conjugal disunion.

As his daughters grew up, indeed, it gave him some pain to see them imbibe pernicious lessons, and frustrate the better purposes of their nature. But he had the consolation of possessing a couple of sons; who, like most boys formed in the atmosphere of public schools and universities, derived little of their colouring from the family prism.

If they allowed themselves to laugh a little at Lynchcombe and its pomposities, it was not because they considered their own dear Blandhurst, with its pleasant woods and waters, eclipsed by so much grandeur; but because they regarded Sir John Wraysbury as an Attorney-General *manqué;* — a man to whom business was a pleasure, — and pleasure, business; — who could neither sit his own thorough-bred horse, nor bring down his pheasants; — and who looked as if the numeration and multiplication tables were perpetually seething in his brain.

But James and Albert Grandison were seldom at

home: one, being in the Guards, and a Londoner; the other, an *attaché* at one of the great southern courts. — Yet they alone were the cause of the distance maintained towards the family by the fore-sighted Sir John; who was of opinion that two good-looking youngsters, such near neighbours, might prove dangerous acquaintances, hereafter, for the heiress of Lynchcombe. Aware how often it was his ill-fortune to stumble against the Miss Grandisons, on foot, in pony chaise, or on pony back, whenever he strolled about his domain on a tour of inspection, he judged it more than likely that, with more enterprising riders, drivers, and walkers, the opportunities would be doubled. Meetings, on those breezy downs, where the sea air imparted such brilliancy to the complexion, and developed so many charms of symmetry and grace, were not without danger.

Not in his own case. — Never had Mrs. Grandison shot wider of the mark, — and her bow was a long one, than when she asserted that Sir John Wraysbury lived in such terror of the designs upon his hand of his fair neighbours, that when he discerned them from half a mile's distance on the edge of the downs, he instantly put his fat shooting pony to best pace, in a contrary direction. Sir John had far too much confidence in himself for any alarm of the kind; and, never having been at any period of his chequered life a London man, he had heard little of manœuvring

mothers or scheming daughters. His native county was a simple-minded shire. His own courtship was spontaneous; and his sisters had married in the most straight-forward manner in the world.

Had the case been even suggested to him, the practical man would probably have regarded it with the eye of an actuary; and taking out his pencil and tablets, have calculated to a fraction his own value in the money market, as a mere tenant for life. But he *did* foresee danger for his daughter in the shape of two lively young men of fashion, — endowed with good teeth, extensive whiskers, and indomitable assurance.

But for the young Grandisons, Sir John would probably have found pleasure in the society of their father; — a man of his own years; who, though said by his family to shun society, because he retreated into his own den from the flashy groups with which it was their pleasure to invade his house, was anything but unsociable in more congenial company. The sarcastic comments occasionally extorted from him by the worldly ways of his family, as poison-drops may be expressed from a wholesome plant, were never heard save in their presence; and in times of family tumult, he took sanctuary in his quiet library, as persecuted victims of old in some privileged abbey.

Unwilling, however, to embitter the lives of his wife and daughters by depriving them altogether of the atmosphere in which their flimsy wings seemed created

to expand, he allowed them six weeks of London every season; on condition that their stay was never protracted beyond the commencement of the yachting season, when, though guiltless of the marine fopperies and *filoselle* bunting of Cowes, he heartily enjoyed a sail in his little cutter, which, at its moorings in Blandhurst Cove, formed a characteristic feature in the beautiful sea-view commanded by his library windows.

But unluckily this short sojourn in the metropolis served chiefly to revive the flightiness of the girls, and pretensions of their mother; enabling them to defeat Mr. Grandison's views by rendering their country-house, for the remaining forty-six weeks of the year, as mean an imitation of London life, as a view of St. Peter's on a mosaic breast-pin.

Not a foolish fashion, not a paltry toy or silly book in vogue, but was carefully transferred to Blandhurst. — But these were of minor moment; — ephemeral follies, that died with their day of popularity. — The real evil consisted in the society they managed to attract around them: people, whom they considered eminent, simply because they were notorious; popular poets, with laurel crowns of foil and tinsel; natural philosophers, originators of some scientific gimcrack; a prima donna secretly married (in presence of the universe) to some Hungarian magnate; or a primo tenore the son of a Spanish grandee, and wearing the

Golden Fleece in his waistcoat pocket. Above all, the author of the last political squib, naturally a candidate for the next vacant under-secretaryship of state; or a beardless political economist, prepared to prove by figures unimpeachable as those of a Blue-book, or Sir John Wraysbury's banker's account, — that by an interchange of commodities, the population of united Christendom might be kept, fat and well-liking, at a daily average of the fifth part of a maravedi per head. To crown all, an artist or two, — Lawrences and Wilkies in embryo, — to preside over the picturesqueness of the grouping, and enshrine the whole party in album immortality, — *i. e.* the Anno Domini ensuing.

Such a coterie, though out of date in London, where lion-feeding went out with old Lady Cork, and had its requiem said or sung in the sketches of Boz and Albert Smith, — had not lost its attraction in the provinces. The chorus-singer of the metropolitan opera, becomes the star of a country town; and the class of people who, in restless pursuit of novelty, pay a double subscription to circulating libraries for the pleasure of cutting every new book, — who cannot enjoy the annual exhibitions, except on private days, and who crowd to the first representation of a play or opera, at the risk of their ribs and carriage panels, — find infinite satisfaction in beholding face to face those who are better met across the foot-lamps; or on a title-

page: too eager to parade at second-hand the crumbs of information picked up from some Arctic discoverer, Swedish professor, or American Medium, to ascertain whether these itinerant workers of miracles be true prophets, or Jack-Puddings in disguise.

To Sir John Wraysbury, whose ideas of geographical discovery scarcely overstepped Cook's voyages, and who still believed in the Satire of the Anti-Jacobin and the sculpture of Nollekens, these fashionable impostors heralded by the *Mirliton* or penny-trumpet which is the clarion of drawing-room fame, — were simply bad characters to be avoided: — people not to be trusted with your name, lest they should use and abuse it, in endorsing either a bill or some mischievous tenet.

That not one of Mrs. Grandison's black swans, or calves with six legs, should ever set foot in Lynchcombe Hall, he was steadfastly resolved. And as its façade, rising above the woods, afforded one of the finest objects in the neighbourhood, and as it was known to contain many admirable works of art, it was no small mortification to the vain-glorious lady to be obliged to own, in answer to the hints of her guests, especially such as pretended to be artists, that the enchanted castle was unapproachable.

"Sir John Wraysbury considered his daughter, being motherless, as too young to receive visitors; and

upon principle, set his face against making a show-house of his family mansion."

"If he possessed a treasury of art such as that of Lord Westminster, Lord Ellesmere, the Duke of Bedford, and many others of the aristocracy," added Mrs. Grandison, by way of apology, "he would, of course, be obliged to pay the customary tax for such a distinction. But as his collection consists of a few cast and copies, and the chief attraction of his house is a daughter who will some day be rich enough to pay off the national debt, he is quite richt to put iron bars to his doors and windows. — We all know that the custody of the crown jewels is a sinecure, compared with the guardianship of an heiress."

CHAPTER XIX.

Be it not inferred from the churlishness ascribed by Blandhurst to Lynchcombe Hall, that Sir John Wraysbury was a niggard of his hospitalities. On the contrary, the new mansion was already as renowned for its pompous festivities, as became its gigantic proportions. — All the great people of the county had been successively entertained under its roof; and hecatombs were served upon a service of plate emblazoned in relief with the Wraysbury arms, choice specimens of which had made the tour of Europe to delight the eyes of half its crowned heads; and the Lynchcombe cellar of wines was supposed to excel that of Sardanapalus.

But after these periodical displays, — a not uncommon case, — the tureens and epergnes subsided into the plate closets, and the binns became hermetically sealed, for the better manufacture of cobwebs: — leaving father, daughter, and governess to so silent a system of daily meals, that the old family portraits might have figured at table without exhibiting greater taciturnity than the rest of the party. That celebrated picture, the foundation of Sir John Wraysbury's fortunes, to which, in gratitude, he had decreed the place

of honour, in his banqueting-room of richly carved oak, seemed to look down with a smile of superiority on the ungenial formality of the circle. — If Echo was worshipped in silence, of old, by the disciples of Pythagoras, the descendants of Wraysbury the First were quite as deferential.

Among the few to whom the hospitalities of Lynchcombe were ever tendered in vain, and by whom at best they were reluctantly accepted, were the Farmers. But that Aunt Sophy considered it her duty to bring her two nieces occasionally together, never would they have crossed the threshold. Mr. Farmer, now ripening in years, and seeing only the clearer as he advanced towards the fountain-head of wisdom and light, regretted to perceive his predictions verified in the utter worldliness of his former pupil. So far from rising to the level of his fortunes, his faculties were becoming stifled in gold dust; till his noble-minded brother-in-law grew weary of his selfish parade and shabby mistrust. But the Farmers were afraid that if the little Constance they so dearly loved, were wholly withheld from her family, Sir John might some day or other take it into his head to claim her back from their hands.

Every spring, therefore, the dreariness of the young heiress's life was enlivened, for ten days or a fortnight, by the company of that dear little sister, whose loss and absence had created such a void in her existence.

For though Janetta never ventured to oppose any measure proposed or sanctioned by her father, the departure of Constance had grieved her all the more deeply that she had been forced to conceal her tears.

Miss Avesford, a born bankrupt in the affections, looked upon the relations of her pupils as a mere obstruction to the great business of youth — namely, the methodical acquirement of polite letters; and, like the spendthrift who defined trees as excrescences of the earth, created by nature for the defrayal of gentlemen's debts, regarded Aunt Sophy and her little protégée as excrescences created by nature for the purpose of alienating Miss Wraysbury's mind from her lessons. Having accidentally ascertained that Mrs. Farmer spoke no French and understood not a word of Italian or German, she felt indignant, indeed, that Sir John should waste a fortnight of his daughter's precious time, in doing the honours of Lynchcombe to such an aunt. — Left in solitary possession of the school-room, to rehearse irregular verbs and correct an abridgment of the History of the Lower Empire for the use of schools, which she was endeavouring to render as dry as a lime-burner's wig, she grumbled sorely at the temporary enfranchisement of her victim.

But what moments of joy were those, for Janetta! — What a release! — What a comfort! — Aunt Sophy, the guardian angel of her childhood, whom she so well remembered, at Ramsgate, hanging over

her feverish bed; when her father was absent, when her little brother lay dead and her mother dying. — She remembered, too, their summer pastimes at Denny Cross, when her newly-enriched parents were health-seeking in Germany. But the fondest remembrance of all was, that when her mother was taken from her, (and even now Netta could not recall the day without tears,) Mrs. Farmer led her by the hand into the chamber of death, and having quietly removed the sheet from the sweet face of her they had lost, for her last, last kiss, they wept and prayed together.

So that Aunt Sophy was almost sacredly dear to her; as dear as anything *could* be, short of a mother; and when she saw the affection existing between her and little Constance, so far from feeling jealous of either, she loved them both the better for the triple tie thus created.

Then it was so comfortable to be able to talk about Denny Cross, and inquire about grandpapa and Aunt Bessy. For her father, whom she seldom saw except in Miss Avesford's presence, always discouraged such inquiries; and Netta, though too sensitive to express the surmise, had settled it with herself that it gave him pain to approach a subject, or a spot, so nearly connected with the memory of his departed wife. — His departed wife! — of whom he now thought as seldom as of the little Johnny lying in the Kentish

churchyard, forgotten, unless a pretext was wanting to Sir John for his disregard of his sisters.

But even Mrs. Farmer was becoming less willing to answer the questions of Janetta concerning the dear old grandpapa by whom she used to be lifted on the back of the dun pony, or introduced to the merry junketing of a harvest home. — Even Constance appeared estranged from the poor old man. For the venerable squire had, alas! outlived his faculties as well as his strength. Paralysis, accelerated by an unlucky accident, had long rendered him bedridden.

Janetta could now account for her father's refusal to allow her to accompany him to Harals, at his last visit to the now nearly finished house, in order that she might enjoy, at least a day, at Denny Cross. He was right. The sight of the helpless old man would have been too painful. He was also right in forbidding her to continue her correspondence with him. But it would have saved her many anxious moments had he explained the cause of his prohibition. She had feared that a total estrangement was springing up between the families.

"Poor girl — poor girl!" ejaculated Farmer, in answer to his wife's tearful statement of the want of confidence created between father and daughter by the systematic reserve of Sir John. "His heart has become callous by saturation in gold."

"Or perhaps he is beginning to entertain towards

poor Netta the mean jealousy which kings and great people are said to entertain of their successors," — added his wife.

"At all events," argued the kind-hearted old man, whose domestic affections, if they had blossomed late, had fructified kindly, — "at all events, do not render the girl over-conscious of her destitution, by letting her perceive our overfondness for our pet. No reason why, because we choose to make a spoiled child of Constance, we should make a malcontent of her sister,"

Just then, however, it would have been difficult to overcloud Miss Wraysbury's sunny countenance. If Harry's holidays could but have been rendered simultaneous with the visit of the Farmers, her joy would have been too complete! — Not so, however, that of the veteran lawyer, whose vague notion of an Eton boy was that of an insane monkey escaped from its cage.

Janetta meanwhile had questions to propound to Aunt Sophy wholly unconnected with Denny Cross. Not missish questions. She had no curiosity to learn whether they were ever again to inhabit the house in Carlton Gardens. She had never troubled her head about coming out or being presented: not even after being nearly catechised to death on the subject by Mrs. Grandison and her daughters. — But she wanted to know what had become of certain aunts and cousins

who haunted her memory, at times, like snatches of a half-forgotten tune. Surely she had been caressed and petted by an aunt Emma, and tormented by a cousin Edgar? — Surely Mrs. Farmer must recollect a noisy little girl in a pink sash, named Theodosia, who had spent the day with them in Carlton Gardens? —

Then, there was a grave, silent boy, — his name, she thought, was Olave, whom her father had seemed to dislike, but who was certainly one of the family. In the old house at Harrals, she had heard her darling mother remonstrate with papa for taking no notice of his nephew. *How* was he his nephew, and *why* did he take no notice of him? — Was this sad-looking Olave still alive? —

"You have asked me more questions than I can answer, dearest Netta," replied her aunt, smiling at the affectionateness of nature that developed itself in spite of the refrigerating influence of her niece's education. — "Your father, at the time of his marriage, had three sisters —"

"Yes, yes! — there was a third; — I felt sure there was a third!" — cried Miss Wraysbury, clapping her hands. — "I have so often thought about it, — so often wondered how it all used to be. But papa so dislikes anything like idle questioning, that I never ventured to ask him. — Indeed, I could hardly have done so without alluding to former days and the name of poor, dear mamma," said she, in a more subdued

voice. — "But I well remember, when I was a child in a black frock, — when we were all, even the servants, in mourning, — an aunt Clara. — Who was aunt Clara? — Was she — married?" —

Mrs. Farmer was too discreet to answer "to her cost;" — but explained, in as few words as possible, that aunt Clara was the wife of a Mr. Wroughton, — for whom Sir John Wraysbury entertained no great partiality; that aunt Caroline, who had long been dead, had left a son called Olave Harpsden, who was destined for the church; and that aunt Emma and her husband, Mr. Molyneux, the parents of Edgar and Theodosia, resided chiefly in Italy.

This was as much as she could disclose without violating the rules laid down by Sir John in the education of his daughter. A hundred times had he declared of old, in presence of his sister-in-law, that the breach between himself and his sisters was irreparable; and that never should his children live on terms of amity with their cousins. But she was not at that time prepared to find him so cruelly consistent. She was in hopes that time would have tamed down his resentments. As she glanced at the beautiful face of Janetta, animated by sensibility and intelligence, and then at the fair face of little Constance, who, though now nearly ten years old, was still fondled upon her knee, she could not help hoping that their mother's

tender nature had descended to them, as well as her prepossessing smile. She trusted there was little of the unchristianised blood of the Woolstons in their humbler veins.

"I have news for you, my dear Mrs. Farmer," said Sir John, whose sudden entrance at that moment startled her from her reverie, and who was luckily too much absorbed in the intelligence he was about to communicate, to notice the guilty blush with which his elder daughter greeted his arrival.

"Good, I hope?" she replied, endeavouring to rally her spirits.

"Good, in some points of view, though unfortunately prefaced by a death. To-day's Times, which I have left Farmer spelling over in the library, announces that Lord Dinton died suddenly, yesterday morning, while attending the Quarter Sessions."

"What a sad shock for his family!"

"At seventy-five?"

"At any age, the sudden death of a parent is awful. And the Molyneuxes are a very attached family. His daughters will be deeply affected."

"My precious brother-in-law, I suspect, will submit to his bereavement with much resignation, — unless his post-obits are heavier than we know of."

"Is that why you announced your news as good?" —

"Far from it. In Gerald or his affairs, I retain

not a particle of interest. But I was thinking that now would be the time for Wilchester (Lord Dinton we must learn to call him) to renew his suit to your sister, — if, indeed, he still entertains any intentions of the kind."

"He certainly does not; — for his suit needs no renewal. — It has never ceased," said Mrs. Farmer, a little disgusted.

"You don't mean that he ever actually proposed to Bessy Pennington!" exclaimed Sir John, with undisguised astonishment.

"Many years ago. — Long before the death of poor Maria."

"And she never confided it to me!"

"On second thoughts, I believe she was not aware of it; for even to myself, Bessy has never mentioned the subject. — It was Lord Wilchester himself who endeavoured to enlist the advocacy of my husband."

"How strange that he should never have spoken to *me*, — connected as I am with him by marriage!"

"That very circumstance may have created scruples. — It was scarcely likely you would promote a match so disadvantageous to the interests of your sister and nephew,"

"It must, however, be pretty apparent to the Molyneux family, that all affection between Emma and

myself was extinguished by her conduct to poor Maria and her babes; but pray tell me, — since you say that they came to an understanding some years ago, — what has prevented the marriage? — Wilchester was independent of his family."

"And had he not been so, they warmly approved his choice."

"Most extraordinary! — You don't really mean to say that Bessy refused him?"

"So he informed me. Had I heard it from my sister, I should have thought it necessary to keep her secret."

"She had some previous attachment then? — Perhaps, some previous engagement?"

"None whatever."

"Then why on earth, did not Farmer use his influence with her to promote the marriage?"

"My husband is of opinion that no person should ask, and no person give, advice on a point so entirely personal as matrimony."

"It is indeed a heavy responsibility," observed Sir John, recalling to mind how thoroughly Roger Farmer's own marriage had taken his friends by surprise.

"In Bessy's case, however," added Mrs. Farmer, "he could not have undertaken the suitor's cause, for he perfectly approved her conduct."

"Approved her refusing the hand of a peer — a

wealthy peer — a man universally loved and respected? — Very unlike Farmer's usual good sense. In general, his views are more practical."

"He approved the conduct of Bessy, I was about to add, in acting up to the dictates of her conscience. She felt it her duty to devote herself to the declining years of my father. She was his last, — his dearest, — his only. — And having once made up her mind to reject the most brilliant prospects for his sake, it would have been a capitulation of conscience had she been persuaded into an act that would probably have shortened the days of one to whom she was so nobly devoted."

"But why should it have shortened his days? Why could not Hugh take care of him?"

"My brother has his own avocations; and what son could replace female nursing and attendance, to one so helpless as my father?"

"But if Wilchester's heart were set upon the match, he would doubtless have spared no expense to have Mr. Pennington properly attended to."

Mrs. Farmer's cheeks flushed crimson.

"I thought you knew my poor father better. Did you ever find him accept obligations from a son-in-law? — When you proposed keeping a close carriage for him after his first paralytic attack —"

"Yes, yes! I remember," — interrupted Sir John, who had felt deeply aggrieved, at the time, by the

independent tone in which his somewhat patronising offer was declined by the Penningtons. "But this is a very different affair."

"*So* different, that Lord Wilchester would have given up a wing of his house at Havermead to the exclusive use of the invalid and his attendants, could Bessy have been induced to consent. But knowing my father's habits, she feared the change of residence would be irksome to him."

"What folly, — what infatuation, — what selfish disregard to the interests of her family!"

"She was aware that her family wanted nothing from Lord Wilchester," rejoined Mrs. Farmer, proudly. "Nor can I consider her conduct foolish, since the sacrifice has never caused her a moment's repentance."

Sir John Wraysbury checked a remark that was rising to his lips, not altogether complimentary to the understanding of poor Bessy.

"And do you really think," said he, after a short pause, "that Wilchester — that is, that Lord Dinton — might be induced to renew —"

But Mrs. Farmer would not hear him to an end. "He is still as deeply attached to my sister as a man can be," was her earnest reply. "They are not what is called engaged, because Bessy did not choose him to be hampered by ties which, living as he did in the world, and often apart from her for months together, might at times be a constraint."

"Romance! — Quixotism!" —

"Good sense and good feeling!" persisted Mrs. Farmer. "But thought ignorant of my sister's present views and intentions, I confess I am of opinion that, all times and places having become alike to my poor old father, Bessy would be wrong to wait for his death to reward Lord Dinton's devotion. My father would not be conscious of his removal to the Castle; and she might become the happiest of wives, and perhaps of mothers, without ceasing to be the best of daughters."

Sir John could scarcely listen to her with patience. *His* appreciation of the poor old squire, made after his usually monetary standard, stood at so low a figure, that the idea of *his* comfort or convenience being placed in the scale against that of the Right Honourable the Earl of Dinton, seemed preposterous. He had thought it absurd that Hugh Pennington, his brother-in-law, had chosen to wait for the old man's death before he took a wife and possession of the estate. — But the interpretation of the fifth commandment insisted on by Bessy and acquiesced in by the Farmers and the new Earl, was beyond his comprehension.

Catching a glimpse at that moment of Farmer, digesting his "Times" on the terrace facing the library window, he hurried off in search of him, hoping to extract from the husband some elucidation of the enigma propounded by the wife.

The door had scarcely closed upon him, and

Mrs. Farmer still sat absorbed in the reflections to which his narrow-minded, or rather narrow-hearted philosophy gave rise, when she felt her hand, which rested on the shoulder of little Constance as she sat working on a low stool by her side, gently taken, and fondly pressed to the lips of her elder niece. — Unless she was much mistaken, a tear had fallen upon it before it was released.

"Netta!" — she exclaimed with surprise, remembering suddenly that on the entrance of Sir John, Miss Wraysbury had retreated into the embrasure of the Elisabethan window near which she was seated; and that, shaded by the heavy folds of the velvet curtain, she must have been an auditress of their explanations.

"Forgive me!" whispered the young girl, endeavouring to overcome her emotion.

"Forgive you for what, my dear child? — For having accidentally learned what I have no objection that you should know?" —

"No, no; — for having troubled you with so many idle questions about my father's family, when there was so much in your own to excite my interest and respect. — Dear aunt, all this is so new to me! — Till now, I never dreamed that, in a quiet destiny like aunt Bessy's, there could be scope for so much heroism, — so much greatness of mind: — *real* great-

ness!" — added Janetta, drawing a chair close to Mrs. Farmer's, and again taking her hand.

"You have been hitherto too young, Janetta, to be talked to about such things."

"Why too young? — For how many years past has my memory been loaded, in lessons, with historical examples of fortitude, — magnanimity, — disinterestedness, — resignation, — every high-sounding virtue. — Yet I have been allowed to consider this dear self-denying aunt of mine as a mere inoffensive woman, — a neglected old maid, — to my recollections of whom it rather annoyed papa to see me cling with affection. — I ought to have been taught to regard her with veneration!" added Janetta, with enthusiasm. And from her seeming remorse, Mrs. Farmer readily inferred that Sir John Wraysbury of Lynchcombe, had endeavoured to extinguish all reminiscence of the Denny Cross, which to John Woolston of Maple Hill, had been so often a city of refuge.

It was something that neither the mercenary father nor the eclectic governess had been able to crush down in the heart of her niece the generous impulses of nature; and at that moment Netta appeared as dear to her as when, in infancy, she had so often hung over her cot, to soothe her to sleep, or await her early waking.

"But tell me about this Lord Wilchester — this Lord Dinton," — resumed Miss Wraysbury, when

many a loving kiss had been imprinted on her fair young forehead. — "Is he, except for his constancy, worthy of aunt Bessy?"

"That depends on your notion of desert. He is neither young nor handsome, Netta; — qualities essential to a young lady's hero of romance."

"But I am not yet what is called a young lady. The only heroes I am acquainted with, are either accoutred in chain-mail, or wear ruffs and peaked beards."

"Then I must admit that there is little of the Bayard, or the Sir Philip Sidney, in Lord Dinton. — But he is a man of the highest qualities; a man who has spent his life in doing kindly actions, and, without placing himself prominently before the world, promoting the good of the many and the happiness of those nearest to him."

"Well, *that*, I call a hero!" — rejoined Netta, eagerly. — "And how fortunate, that a man so excellent should have found out, in her quiet obscurity, a person so nobly assorted to him as my aunt!"

Miss Avesford, had she been present, would perhaps have suggested something about "elective affinities." Mrs. Farmer, alluding probably to her own singularly happy marriage, merely said that the goodness of God often placed most unexpectedly in each other's way, the persons of all others best suited to promote each other's happiness.

"Do you think so? — Do you *really* think so?" inquired Netta, with kindling interest. — "It would make me very happy to believe it. — The time is coming, — (I am seventeen, you know, aunt Sophy, next week, — and what happy birthdays you and dear mamma used to prepare for me when I was a little, little child; — and what would I give to have one of those birthdays again)" —

"Seventeen! — *Already!*" — interrupted Mrs. Farmer with a sigh.

"And I must some day, — at no distant time perhaps, — mix in the world, and love, and marry, like other people. Now the persons with whom papa likes chiefly to associate, are just such as would never 'promote *my* happiness;' and I sometimes fear that if some favourite friend of his wanted me for a wife, my own inclinations would be very little consulted — *I* should not be allowed to say 'no,' like aunt Bessy."

Mrs. Farmer patted kindly the head now almost nestling on her shoulder.

"Your alarms, my dear child, are a little premature," said she. "In the first place, papa appears to have very few favourite friends; nor are these times when reluctant damsels are forced into compulsory marriages. — Next year, Netta, you will probably accompany him to town. He tells me he is refurnishing the house in Carlton Gardens."

"The last place I could wish to live in," exclaimed

Netta, the smiles called forth by the kindness of aunt Sophia vanishing at once. "I have never been there since my darling mother's death."

"Yet if he wishes it, Netta, you must obey. To sacrifice your own wishes at the call of duty, is one of those traits of the heroism of private life, of which you spoke just now with such enthusiasm."

"I shall at least see more of you and Constance than by remaining at Lynchcombe," replied Janetta, — endeavouring to reconcile herself to the idea of a fine house and gay season in town.

"We shall meet often, I trust," said Mrs. Farmer; while the industrious little girl by her side, threw down her work to rejoice with her sister at so pleasant a prospect. "But I doubt, darling, whether your father will wish you to be *too* much in our society. He will probably have higher ambitions."

She checked herself; remembering how anxiously Sir John had forewarned her against prematurely apprizing his daughter that she was the first heiress in the kingdom.

"But what has ambition to do with family affection?" exclaimed Janetta, warmly. — "Are you not my own dear aunt?"

"So is my sister Bessy. — Yet Sir John has, for some years past, forbidden your visits to Denny Cross."

"Only because they would have interrupted my education."

Mrs. Farmer smiled.

"Sir John is likely to come into parliament," added she, desirous to distract her niece's attention. — "He has been solicited to stand for Northamptonshire; and now his building is over, both here and at Harrals, his time is his own, and he will probably make it over to the country. This will necessitate his frequent residence in town."

"And at Harrals, too," added Miss Wraysbury, cheerfully, — for the idea of Northamptonshire connected itself with Denny Cross, and seemed to *dis*connect them with the county into which she felt that they had simply purchased their way.

"It has always been anticipated," added Mrs. Farmer, "that when the death of the old Earl placed Lord Wilchester in the Upper House, your father would succeed him in the representation of the county."

"God grant that he may prove worthy of his predecessor!" — said Janetta, fervently.

And with more earnestness than conviction, did Mrs. Farmer echo the prayer.

CHAPTER XX.

Poor old Denny Cross! — If human beings of a certain age exhibit little improvement in aspect as they advance in years, houses and household goods, when unrenovated, are not less apt to degenerate. — If somewhat worn during the courtship of John Woolston, the lapse of more than a score of years, during which not a guinea had been unnecessarily laid out on the beautification of the place, left it miserably shabby.

The young squire, if such a word were still applicable to a man so bald and steady as Hugh Pennington, though forced by his father's imbecile condition to take upon himself the administration of the family affairs, was so nobly frugal in his expenditure, (in order that the utmost economy might set aside some provision for his two younger brothers, who were struggling for a competence in that anomalous quarter of the world which in some future century will enrich or extinguish the mother country,) that the parlour carpet was threadbare, and the ungravelled garden-walks were all but converted into meadow-land.

Yet such was the happy influence of Bessy's cheerful countenance and soothing voice, that the devoted

man who quitted gilded cornices and three-piled velvet to seek her in that dreary abode, had never so much as noticed its discomfort. — There, he was always sure to find her, — always occupied, but never busy; overjoyed by his arrival, yet betraying her happiness only by heightened colour, or the inner brightening of the eye: — ever ready to listen when he wanted to talk, — or to talk, if he seemed disposed to listen.

For though Miss Pennington had arrived at the critical age of thirty and a year or two, she retained the bloom of early girlhood. As amid the tranquil plains of the Low Countries, the monuments of the middle ages retain an almost miraculous freshness, while their mediæval contemporaries of less torpid lands are shaken into ruins, the gentle anchorette of Denny Cross was perhaps indebted to its untroubled atmosphere for a more than allotted prolongation of youth. — On the very day that Lord Dinton, as soon as was respectful to the memory of his father after consigning him to the tomb, made his appearance in his old haunts, to urge more earnestly than ever her acceptance of his hand, one of the girlish but London-worn Miss Grandisons might have been jealous of her smoothness of brow and purity of complexion.

The new Earl came armed with many fresh arguments in his own favour. He had ascertained that the removal of Bessy and her father from Denny Cross would facilitate a marriage likely to insure the hap-

piness of the son who was at present scarcely master of the house; and on the other hand, he brought with him letters from his mother and sisters, assuring her that nothing would so much endear the asylum offered to them by Dinton at the Castle for the remainder of their days, as to find the family circle completed by her presence.

But there was no need for him to accost her with these persuasives. On seeing him in such deep mourning, and so much disheartened and fagged by the dispiriting scenes through which he had been lately passing, Bessy was more touched by his hollow eyes than by the best eloquence he could have exercised. As she gazed upon him, her own were filled with tears.

When he became sufficiently himself to argue that their immediate union would be the means of securing not only their own happiness, but that of four persons so dear to them, she was prepared to listen; and by the time the new Earl remounted his horse, after luncheon, to ride back to the Castle, he had obtained a letter in answer to that of his mother, promising her a third daughter to be the comfort of her declining years.

They were to be married, — even that question was all but settled, — when the close of his six months' mourning enabled the Earl to appear at the altar in a suit suitable a bridegroom. — Even *he*

pressed for no more; aware that the dowager Countess would be distressed by the slightest infringement of those laws of propriety on which she delighted to "show an example to the county."

In the interim, he was to be as much the happiest of men as comported with his black gloves and the crape round his hat; and above all, with having to ride or drive three or four times a-week over a hard and hilly road for a glimpse of his ladye-love; — a performance far more trying than Romeo's, when he over-topped the orchard walls of that prosy gentleman, Old Capulet.

When it transpired in the neighbourhood, as such secrets though sealed under the patent locks of Chubb are sure to transpire, that the alliance was settled, the lukewarm young gentlemen of the day, whom nothing short of a fox has power to stir to exertion, shrugged their shoulders at the idea of taking so much trouble for a woman "hundreds of years' old;" — while such of the young ladies, from the daughters of Groby Abbey downwards, as had entertained abortive designs on the middle-aged Romeo, expressed sincere pity for the future Countess. Not one among them would have heard of such a thing as residing under the same roof with the dowager and her two elderly daughters. What a circle of coddles! — What a jumble of rights and titles! —

Yet it was to that very home-circle the kindly

Bessy was looking forward as to one of the most attractive features of her married life. Since the departure of her sisters from Denny Cross, she had been prevented by her father's claims upon her time, from cultivating much intimacy with those of her own sex. And now that Mr. Pennington's state precluded all enjoyment of domestic intercourse, — now that her brother's thoughts were engrossed elsewhere by his attachment and its projects, — now that Netta was no longer permitted to visit or correspond with Denny Cross, — she often sighed after female companionship. Her perspective of the fireside at the Castle was bright with pleasant hopes.

It was a comfort to know that the Gerald Molyneuxes had established themselves permanently in Italy. From all she had formerly heard from poor Maria of her gay sister-in-law, Bessy Pennington felt that she should have scarcely found courage to confront the indignation of the worldly Emma, to whose pride the marriage of her old bachelor brother-in-law would be indeed a blow.

She would have hardened her heart, however, could she have heard the unwomanly savageness with which Mrs. Molyneux, whose nature, never very tender, had hardened by continually struggling against the rough handling of the world, allowed herself to comment on the tardy union of the superannuated Pyramus and Thisbe. — It would have been difficult to combine

greater injustice with bitterer spite than was exhibited on occasion of the marriage, both by Gerald and his wife.

For the conduct of Lord Dinton had been more than generous. Not only had he doubled the addition which his father's death made to their bespoken income; but in stating his desire that Edgar, now at Oxford, should complete his education on the same liberal scale on which, as heir-apparent to the family honours, it had commenced, had settled twenty thousand pounds upon his nephew, lest the change in his prospects should prove a drawback to his entrance into life.

"We are all much attached to him," wrote he to his brother. "A finer young fellow never lived. And I trust that, a year or two hence, when the tour of Europe (which you think so indispensable,) is complete, you will allow him to consider Molyneux Castle his permanent home."

"A pretty home, poor boy; mewed up with those four old maids, and the dowager!" exclaimed Mrs. Molyneux, when these kind proposals were recited to her by her husband. "But there is one comfort. Such an establishment can never hold together. The arrangement will not last a year. As our wise Queen Elisabeth observed, 'the sky cannot bear two suns;' and your mother would as little like to subside into a

satellite, as a Miss Pennington to put up with being less than paramount in her own house."

"The system works well enough here, and still better in France," retorted her husband, whose feelings were in some degree softened towards the intended bride and bridegroom by the provision secured to his son. — "Look at the San Sevorinis, — look at the Guidaldis. Above all, look at the Biron-Argenteaus. Three dowagers under one roof, — as happy as weasels in a meal-tub." —

"Foreigners are better-humoured than English people," said Mrs. Molyneux, peevishly; "and are taught from the cradle the virtue of mutual aid and mutual toleration. Whereas *we* are allowed to make such pets of all our little selfishnesses, that close contact makes us unbearable to each other. — Depend upon it there will soon be fighting and scratching at the Castle; and I shall write and advise Edgar to keep out of the way of their squabbles."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind," said Gerald, in a tone which even his habitually listless air did not prevent from being peremptory. — "How is your son ever to make acquaintance with his cousin, except through the medium of my brother and his intended?"

"*What* cousin?" inquired Mrs. Molyneux, with real or affected surprise.

"His cousin at Harrals."

"The boy is still at Eton; and seven years younger than Edgar. — Perhaps you mean Olave Harpsden, who is about his own age?" —

"You know perfectly well whom I mean. — There is but one member of your family with whom it could be of the slightest advantage to him to associate. — Of mine, not one." —

"Why not explain yourself more clearly? Had you said 'the *heiress*,' I should have understood you *à demi mot*."

"But had I said the heiress, and had you written of her by that name to Edgar, the quills of his magnanimity would have been on end, and there would have been an end of my project. Be cautious, therefore."

"Not with *him*. I am ready to exercise my utmost tact with all the rest of the world. But to my darling Edgar, I write as my heart dictates. I would not manœuvre with Edgar, to make a prince of him."

"But I suppose you would do something to prevent his becoming a beggar? — which, if Providence should crown this slow match of my brother's with a large family, is likely enough to become his case."

"Lord Dinton has provided against *that*."

"As if twenty thousand pounds were not beggary to a young fellow brought up like Edgar!"

"At all events, he is certain of an introduction

to my niece, without assistance from the future Lady Dinton."

"I doubt it. — Wraysbury has always detested us. People generally hate their poor relations. Do you remember how you abominated his wife, when they were living on three farthings a-year, somewhere near Hampstead or Highgate?"

"Abominated, no! — You might as well talk of stabbing a cobweb. — There was not substance in poor Maria to excite so strong a feeling."

"Neglected, then. — Why cavil about such paltry distinctions? — But setting aside the especial dislike with which we are honoured by Wraysbury, I understand he is bringing up his daughter under the receiver of an air-pump."

"What can you possibly mean?"

"Inquire of Berty Grandison what *he* means. Berty is my informant. Berty's father has a place in Dorsetshire — *has* had since the Conquest, — a few miles from the quarry-above-ground which Sir John has judiciously placed at the edge of a cliff as high as Shakespeare's."

"I was not aware that old Grandison resided near my brother. That accounts for Albert's assiduities in this house."

"I flatter myself, the best dinner and best whist-table in Rome require no such endorsement. But ask him by-and-by, and he will tell you that Miss Wrays-

bury is educated as if intended for a Sister of Mercy. No one is allowed to see her, and she is allowed to see no one. — The man in the iron mask was not more scrupulously guarded than Janetta by that patent governess whom you introduced into the family a dozen years ago."

"Poor child! Has she been undergoing high-pressure cultivation all this time under the drill system? — What a little dunce she must have grown up!"

"You and your brother differ as widely in your theories of education, as in most other respects. — Miss Wraybury has been reared in the dark, to teach her to see: and Theo. in the blaze of day, in hopes to render her blind."

"Say rather to accustom her to sights which are apt to startle a novice, and render her first step in life a stumble. — Janetta will have every thing to learn, at the time she should be enjoying and adorning society."

"I suppose you know best. *I* have never interfered in Theo's education, — admitting it to be your department as much as that of the boy is mine. — Theo. is a tolerably good girl, I believe; and a very pretty one, as you, and Fred Hill, and Saint Marcel, and Berty Grandison, have been telling her twenty times a-day, ever since she was out of a pinafore. — Still, I can't fancy that she would be the less attractive

for being a little less *désabusé du monde.* To be occasionally startled and shy, would do her no harm, — Babies in long-clothes cannot be taught to walk alone." —

For the credit of human nature, be it recorded that the nephew, of whose possible fate Lord Dinton was so considerate, evinced a little more gratitude than his heartless parents. — Perhaps, because his disappointment was less. — His school and college vacations, spent at the Castle, had not only attached him to its inmates, but rendered him fully aware of Lord Wilchester's attachment; and though the old servants and tenants persisted in regarding him as the heir of Dinton, *he* had never been deceived. Often had he accompanied his uncle in his courtship expeditions to the old parlour, and was a favourite alike with Roger Farmer and the less unsophisticated family of the old squire; and so warmly did he share the partiality of Lady Mary and Lady Jemima for the gentle recluse, whom he persisted in calling "*la belle au bois dormant,*" that, when informed that though the funeral baked meats of the late Earl were not to furnish forth the marriage-table of his successor, the bombazine of the two noble spinsters was, in a decent time, to give place to bridesmaiden white, he was unable to resist a mild "hurrah!"

"I knew it would be so," said Lady Jemima to her sister, when they subsequently discussed the con-

duct of their nephew. "Edgar is as noble-hearted a being as ever breathed. Not a particle of Woolston in his composition. I was certain Edgar would be overjoyed at an event that promised happiness to his uncle."

"May your words prove true!" rejoined Lady Mary. "The change in Edgar's prospects was the only drawback to my delight in this marriage; just as my dislike to any further connexion with Sir John Wraysbury, was my only objection to dear Bessy."

Aware that her sister's antipathy to Sir John Wraysbury arose from the belief once prevalent in the neighbourhood, that a marriage between John Woolston and either of the sisters had been vainly proposed to him by the late Sir Harry, and would have been highly acceptable to the late Lord Dinton, (his own strong opposition to the match having become equally public,) Lady Jemima contented herself with replying, that Sir John Wraysbury, having established himself at Lynchcombe, would probably be a rare guest at Molyneux Castle.

"But if he succeeds to my brother, as every body seems to predict, as representative of the county?" —

"True; — I had not thought of him in that capacity. But is it certain that he will be returned?"

"Dinton has no doubt of it. He has been solicited to stand; and the representation of his own county is too great an honour to be declined. Purse-proud as

he is, he can scarcely feel superior to such a distinction." —

"Does my brother mean to support him?" —

"Why not? — Their politics are the same. They were intimate at college, and are nearly connected by marriage. There is every reason why Dinton should uphold Sir John Wraysbury. — In fact, my brother's name is at the head of the deputation."

"Then of course we shall have him settling at Harrals!"

"A neighbour the more. And it would be such a delight to Bessy to have her little niece within reach."

"To Molyneux Castle, I dare say Sir John will find the road from Harrals as short as Gerald used to find it from the Castle to Harrals, when he was in love with Emma Woolston. But if Bessy had been fated to live and die Miss Pennington, I suspect that Denny Cross would have proved immeasurably too far for frequent visiting."

"I am afraid," said Lady Mary, "that his nature is sadly deteriorated since the days when my brother upheld him as so well-principled and so wise. Without going into Emma's grievances against her brother, he seems to have behaved in a cold-blooded manner towards his family. But admit that poor Lady Wraysbury was one of the sweetest creatures in the world? And in her daughter I feel sincerely interested."

"She has a great part to play in life," replied Lady Jemima. "She is to inherit that enormous Wraysbury property: whereas the boy, at the death of his father, will become only Woolston of Harrals; — a country baronet, with less than ten thousand a-year."

"And a very good thing too," retorted her sister, with a reprehensive shake of the head. "In his place, I should prefer it to the mass of Liverpool money, scraped together, it is said, by slave-trade speculations. But here comes Dinton, and nothing does he more dislike than the discussion of people's means and connexions, which he calls gossip and water — the meanest form of a bad thing. What has he in his hand? — Aha! — Sir John Wraysbury's Address to the County."

CHAPTER XXI.

Few things produce a more complete revolution in the best-regulated family, than an Election. — Next to a fire, nothing so imperceptibly gains ground, or so irresistibly carries all before it.

Sir John Wraysbury soon found himself enveloped in the flames of a blazing committee. For an opposition had suddenly started up. The Liberals of the county, who had hitherto reckoned him among their party, had, after perusing his Address, started a Free Trader; and the Landed Gentry were in an uproar. Now, as an Election Committee is entitled, like the second in a duel, to take the conscience of the parliamentary aspirant out of his own hands, just as the second holds in his keeping the honour of his principal, the arbitrary baronet, so fond of the exercise of his authority, found himself most unpleasantly reduced to a cypher. — Enamoured as he was of his own consequence, both moral and personal, he found that on the present occasion he was only allowed to enunciate the speeches prepared for him, and give a blank cheque to his attorneys. — Though aware that the contest, thanks to the contumacy of Groby Abbey in supporting Mr. Aberdon Malins, who had undertaken

to restore Catholic Disabilities and treble the duty on corn, would cost him an amount of thousands which, in his Maple Hill days, would have passed for a fabulous sum, he was not allowed to exercise his own understanding in so much as the choice of colour for his cockades!

That he must establish himself for a time at Harrals he at once perceived. He at first intended, indeed, to leave his daughter and establishment at Lynchcombe. But this he found would be a grave offence to the county, which was about to invest its rights in his person. Miss Wraysbury belonged to it. The great heiress of the day was the property of the shire, both by her father's and mother's side. And as it appeared by the baronetage that the young lady was in her eighteenth year, it was instantly decided that she must form one of the "unprecedented attractions" of the Blue party. — Lady Clementina Aberdon Malin paraded three daughters and a daughter-in-law in the family barouche. It would not do for Sir John Wraysbury to surround himself exclusively with broadcloth. — The deep mourning of the Molyneux family precluded their participation in the tumults of the hustings. Lord Algernon Rawdon, the second name on the committee, was as guiltless as a trappist of female alliance. Miss Wraysbury must compensate for all. Yes, the heiress of Lynchcombe must be forthcoming.

Vainly did Sir John represent that his daughter had never appeared in society: — that she had not even been presented. The committee decided that the rank in life of Woolston of Harrals, did not render such a ceremonial indispensable; and Sir John was privately admonished not to let any allusion to courts or the courtly just then escape his lips. The farmers might hear him, and the effect be injurious.

A summons to Miss Avesford and Netta was in the end hastily despatched; and though the candidate for parliamentary honours sorely longed to adjoin to the missive (like Athelwold the Thane, in writing to his fair Elfrida,) a private prohibition, he was forced to order apartments prepared for her at Harrals Hall.

Unspeakable was the joy of Janetta! — Not because unexpectedly emancipated from the school-room two months earlier than the appointed time; but because Harrals had been the dream of her fancy for years immemorial, and though the house had long been completed, Sir John Wraysbury evinced no intention of removing his family to the spot. Since her mother's death, Janetta had not visited Northamptonshire; and though the new mansion had no especial claim to her interest, how fondly did she long to visit the old church with its family monuments, — the old church where her dear mother was lying! — That much, however short her stay, she might certainly ac-

complish. — Of Denny Cross, she felt less sure. Still, it would go hard if she did not manage to obtain a glimpse of aunt Bessy's loving face, and pay her duty to "poor grandpapa."

All this she revolved and revolved as they traversed the dreary Hampshire Heaths, in order to attain the Midland railway; and while settling how it was to be managed without provoking the opposition of Sir John, Miss Avesford's rational prose fell unnoticed upon her ear as the ticking of a clock. — The purport and forms of an election, — the nature of the Great British constitution, — the rights of the Crown, — the state of parties, past, present, and future, — were judiciously explained by the patent governess. And as her instructions took the shape of a remarkably dull lecture which required no reply, — not even so much as notes of admiration to her notes of historical fact, — Janetta was delighted with her journey.

How she longed for the sight of the new old house. — She knew it only by the design originally furnished to Sir John by his architect; and her eye being less familiar than the almshouses erected within the last ten years have rendered us with the type of scarlet brick and fantastic copings, such as James I. is supposed to have brought from Scotland, and which Scotland borrowed from Flanders, and Flanders it is thought from Spain, she was all eagerness to

look upon a façade so quaintly dissimilar from the cold white dignity of Lynchcombe.

In the hurry of his numberless engagements and appointments, Sir John had forgotten to send a carriage to the station for her, according to his promise; and it was in a very shabby fly, smelling as powerfully of musty hay as if *she* also had an unpayable coal-bill, that the heiress approached the ancient territory of her race. — On entering the park, her attention became so much absorbed by the majestic oaks and elms so much wanting to her sea-bound southern palace, that Miss Avesford instantly perceived that her prose would be thrown away. And lo! the word-mill ceased to clatter.

The style of architecture selected by Sir John was admirably in accordance with the extensive table-land that afforded a site to both the former mansion and the present, as well as with the rigid foliage of the pine grove, which, from some latent yearning after the days of his youth, he had been unwilling to consign to the axe. Nay, even with "the mournful family of yews," somewhat lavishly scattered about; which, from their marvellous growth and beauty, it would have been a crime to sacrifice.

During the ascendancy of Emma and her sisters at Harrals, the old-fashioned gardens, with their wide, straight gravel-walks, their terraces and stone vases, their walls of hornbeam and holly hedges cut into

parapets, (co-eval with the battle of the Boyne,) had been an object of perpetual derision to the junior branches of the house of Woolston. — But the utmost scoffing of the young ladies had not induced Sir Harry to sanction their demolition; not because the sentiment of early association pleaded in their favour; but because to root up the old yews, and extirpate the old hornbeam, would have been a source of some expense. — He set his face resolutely, therefore, against French parterres, which he called the puffs and tartlets of a garden; and the utmost horticultural improvement attempted at Harrals in his time, was the planting of the shrubbery leading to the Londonward Lodge, under the shade of whose gloomy Portugal laurels his son and heir had come to that luckless fit of obstinacy so often repented.

The result was, that the "improvers" employed by the millionary baronet, had found it no less feasible than fashionable to surround the antiquated manor-house with an appropriate pleasaunce; and the edges were re-clipped, and the old yews came out strong in the formal alleys. — In the fore-court, had been judiciously preserved four splendid cedar-trees, such as the shades of Jussieu or Tournefort might have haunted; standing grim and dignified at the angles of the richly carved balustrades, like four familiars of the Inquisition.

Janetta was enchanted. — It was her first ac-

quaintance with an old chateau revivified by a *fontaine de jouvence*, — for such surely was the noble fountain of white marble, "shaking its loosening silver in the sun," in the centre of the court.

But who might be the pilgrim standing under the lofty portal? — A tall rusty-coated young man, who looked more like a tradesman waiting for orders, than a visitor to the house; though the manner in which he was addressed by the footman, who stood at the open door (glancing with an air of contempt towards the entering fly with luggage, which he concluded to contain some of the understrappers of his new fellow-servants from the county of Dorset, and which he was consequently about to order round to the back entrance,) betokened that he belonged to a higher class than was denoted by the quality of his cloth.

As the jingling fly drew up before the portal, the stranger, turning between the enscrolled balustrade that bordered the hall-steps, confronted, face to face, the new-comers; when something in the expression of his own, arrested Miss Wraysbury's attention. It was a grave, earnest look, singularly at variance with the scared and foolish face of the servant; who became ten times more bewildered, on discovering, from the indignant inquiries of the governess concerning the missing carriage, that it was his master's daughter he had been about to dismiss from his gates.

The stranger, having slightly touched his hat to

the ladies with whom he was thus closely brought into collision, had already quitted the spot. But while the servant who, by the absence of his superior in attendance on Sir John, was left to a charge above his capacity, was deliberating whether it was his business to settle with the flyman, order him round to the offices for the discharge of the baggage, or usher his young lady into the house, — he returned, and followed Janetta and her duenna into the hall.

In advancing to accost her, the removal of his hat proved highly beneficial to his shabby appearance; for it gave to view a well-turned head, richly covered with wavy chestnut hair; a fine forehead, and a pair of large and expressive dark grey eyes: the very man, — unless, it should prove to be a parish clerk, or bookseller's bagman, — for a hero of romance!

The footman, restored in some measure to his senses, thought it necessary to place Miss Wraysbury's mind at ease respecting the intruder, by stammeringly announcing "Young Mr. Harpsden."

Before Janetta could so much as start or blush, in token of surprise, her cousin followed up the announcement by apologies uttered in so subdued and constrained a tone, that it was clear he felt ashamed either of his coat or his cousinship.

But the few words that followed, rendered Miss Wraysbury far more agitated than himself.

"I came here by my father's desire," said he, "to

inquire whether Sir John is really as much injured as report has stated. I am unable to procure from your servant the desired information. — But your presence here is sufficient attestation that rumour has exaggerated the evil."

"What evil? — I do not understand you," faltered Janetta, with shortened breath. "Pray, explain yourself. — You are, I conclude, my cousin Olave. — What is supposed to have occurred to my father?"

"If you have heard nothing, we must of course have been misinformed," replied Olave Harpsden, colouring deeply, and feeling himself much in the wrong.

"Pardon me. We left Dorsetshire at six this morning. Yesterday's letters have not yet reached us."

"If you have anything, Sir, to confide to my pupil relative to Sir John Wraysbury, or the progress of his election," interposed Miss Avesford, stiffly, "let me request that you will make me the medium of your communications."

"Pray, pray speak!" cried Janetta, becoming seriously alarmed; "what has happened? — Where, — how is my father?" —

"I still trust that the report may be premature," replied Olave Harpsden, eager to appease her fears. "But a messenger from Northampton passed through the village, an hour ago, bearing a letter from Lord

Dinton to Denny Cross; who stated that an election riot had taken place, — that the military were called out, — and that Sir John Wraysbury had received a wound, (a slight one doubtless,) from some missile. It was to prevent any misconception, of persons, — to set the mind of Miss Pennington, in short, at rest, — that Lord Dinton judged it necessary to dispatch authentic intelligence."

Carefully as Mr. Harpsden disguised the facts of the case, — that Sir John was seriously injured, — the mere hint sufficed to drive every vestige of colour from Janetta's cheek. Unaccustomed to shocks of feeling, she looked imploringly towards Miss Avesford, to suggest such further questioning as she was unable to articulate.

"It is highly desirable, Sir," said the preceptress, drawing up to backboard pitch, "that, having alarmed Miss Wraysbury so cruelly by a precipitate revelation of tidings of apparently very doubtful authenticity, you should be a little more circumstantial in your explanations. On what day, and at what hour, did this disastrous disturbance occur? — And at the instigation of what party, pray, was the aid of the soldiery demanded?"

"I am sorry, Madam, to be unable to satisfy you," was young Harpsden's moderate reply. "It was the hope of putting an end to my uncertainties that brought me hither. But surely if the facts were as

strong as represented, information would have already reached the establishment here?"

"Sir John Wraysbury's house-steward, butler, valet, and head footman are with him, I find, at Northampton," observed Miss Avesford, as haughtily as if semi-proprietress of the domestics so pompously enumerated. "I will ring and make inquiries of the housekeeper."

But the housekeeper, to whom a sudden influx of company had already flustered, so far from being able to afford information, could only add to their distresses a flood of tears.

"If you thought fit," said young Harpsden, suddenly addressing his cousin, "I would ride over immediately to Denny Cross, and ascertain the exact truth. I could be there and back in an hour and a half, — that is," — he continued, with the frankness of a person unaccustomed to regard poverty as a crime, — "if you can afford me the means. My father has neither stud nor stable; and I should lose more time than you could bear to wait, in seeking for a horse in the village."

Miss Wraysbury gave the necessary orders to the housekeeper, who still lingered, sobbing, near the door. Singular enough, that the first act of authority exercised by Janetta under her father's roof, should be in favour of a cousin whose very existence was scarcely recognised by Sir John.

"I will wait upon you again, as promptly as possible, with whatever information I can gather," said Harpsden, judiciously hastening his departure, that the anxious daughter might be left to the indulgence of emotions on which the presence of a stranger imposed restraint. And no sooner was he gone, than she experienced, though not quite so hysterically as the fat housekeeper, the solace of tears.

So far from even glancing at the walls of that new home, so often thought and dreamed of, her face was buried in a sofa cushion, and a thousand indistinct terrors perplexed her mind. Her father was wounded, — perhaps in danger, — perhaps (oh, Heaven avert it!) already dead. How did she accuse herself of recent remissness in her filial duties! — No, she had not loved him as she ought. She, the niece of the exemplary Bessy, that tenderest of daughters, had allowed her affections to be chilled by the distance he chose to place between them. That estrangement she ought to have superseded by warmer devotion. She had done nothing to improve his love. She had made no effort to obtain his confidence.

And if this rumour should be true? If this wound should prove fatal? — If she should be already an orphan? — A terrible gulf seemed to be opening at her feet! — Her brother was a mere child, — her sister, the adopted of another household. But for her

father, however cool, — however distant, — she was alone in the world!

Every minute she was now living seemed an hour, so pregnant was it with thronging thoughts and throbbing emotions.

Even Miss Avesford was forced to respect her grief; and leaving her to its indulgence, proceeded to make the tour of the house, scrutinizing every article of furniture or *virtù* with as brokerish an eye as that of Mary of Orange, when examining the matresses and blankets of her miserable parents' abandoned palace at Whitehall.

Once, during Mr. Harpsden's absence, which her impatience led her to fancy unreasonably prolonged, she started up, and insisted on proceeding to Northampton. — But trifling obstacles are often insuperable. No post-horses were kept in the village; and Sir John's equipages were all engaged in his election business, the cause of her disappointment at the railway station. — And when the experience of seventeen saw no objection to the only means of conveyance within reach, namely, the taxed cart belonging to the stables, Miss Avesford was forced to remind her, that even had chariots and horses been at her disposal, Sir John's instructions, forwarded to them at Lynchcombe, had strictly interdicted their joining him at Northampton.

While the glass of water was still at her lips,

which proved the only refreshment she was capable of swallowing, her cousin Olave quietly re-entered the room; quietly, as regarded deportment, — perhaps that he might not incur another rebuke from the preceptress. But his cheek was flushed, and his eye anxious. He had evidently heard worse news than he chose to communicate.

"The injury sustained by Sir John was inconsiderable," he said; — "a blow on the temple from a stone. But, as Lord Dinton stated in his note, at election times, such incidents are made the most of by both parties: — on one side, to excite sympathy with the victim, — on the other, to avouch unpopularity."

"Lord Dinton, then, considered my father in no sort of danger?" exclaimed Janetta.

"None whatever. — But the convictions of a friend are less to be trusted than those of a professional man."

"You have, perhaps, obtained further and less satisfactory intelligence?"

"Not on which dependence can be placed. But I agree with Miss Pennington, that it would be better if you proceeded at once to Northampton."

Miss Avesford protested loudly against the suggestion. "What did Miss Pennington or Mr. Harpsden know of the wishes of Sir John? — What authority had either of them to interfere?" —

Olave Harpsden made no reply. — He seemed unconscious of her presence. — Her worst anathema would have made no more impression on his mind than the painted thunderbolt in the hands of St. Michael in the mis-matched old window, pretending to be stained glass, in the mouldy church of Harrals.

"Have I your authority to send to Hurdiston for a fly?" said he to his cousin. — "It is the only conveyance to be had."

With similar disregard of all constituted authorities, Janetta eagerly acquiesced; and Mr. Harpsden accordingly left the room.

"You are surely not about to defy all parental authority, Miss Wraysbury, and travel in a hired conveyance to twenty miles' distance, in company with a comparative stranger?" — said the governess, wearied by a long day's travel, and hungering after the excellent dinner that doubtless awaited them.

"I am going to my father, dear Miss Avesford, — I am going to my father!" was all that her agitated pupil could find breath to answer.

It was now dusk, — more than dusk. She had taken no sustenance since day-dawn. — Her voice was husky from weakness, — her countenance haggard from fatigue. — Yet so unmistakeable is the manifestation of a steadfast human will, that the woman she had rarely disobeyed, saw it was useless to argue with her.

When the fly was announced as in waiting, Miss Avesford quietly followed her into it, as if their relative positions were changed. — Mr. Harpsden, who had silently offered his arm to his cousin, mounted beside the driver on the box, so that no servant could have found place for attendance. — A singular equipage for the heiress of millions, proceeding to what she feared might be the death-bed of her father!

Not a word was spoken on the road. The governess, wearied out of her life, slept profoundly. Janetta dozed at intervals, along the dark, dreary road; ever and anon wakened with a start by some painful perception, — some new terror, — some dread of evil to come.

The anguish she had undergone during the last few hours, seemed to have utterly effaced the distance, created by his coldness, between herself and her father. She was prepared to throw herself into his arms, — to beseech his pardon for the involuntary offences of which she might have been guilty, — to be unto him as a little child, — as his own Netta of Maple Hill. — But the longer their journey, and the nearer she approached his presence, the more these excited feelings became tranquillized. Her awe of him returned. By the time they reached the last turnpike, Netta had subsided again into "Miss Wraysbury."

Through the crowd surrounding the gateway of the hotel, she was marshalled without a word spoken, but

with the careful assiduity of a brother, by her cousin Olave: — the governess, thanks to her stalwart form and sturdy elbows, closely following; already rehearsing the harangue she was about to wreak upon the presuming young gentleman in the rusty coat.

But alas! when she had made her way, escorted by a curtseying hostess and legion of waiters, into the well-lighted hall, Mr. Harpsden had wholly disappeared; and her half-fainting charge, clinging heavily to the balusters, was slowly ascending the stairs towards the apartments of Sir John.

Her own long-winded, well-worded inquiries after his condition, were satisfactorily answered. "Sir John was a shade better." But the words were so cautiously spoken, and accompanied by looks so solemn, that danger was clearly implied. —

Left alone in a state sitting-room, to wait for Janetta's return, the poor hungry governess was thoroughly out of her element; no instructions to give, — no reprehensions to utter. — After she had spoiled an excellent fire by endeavouring to improve it, and spelled the names under the gorgeously-framed engravings, gracing the walls, — such as "John Knox," admonishing his (too) gracious Queen, — "The Storming of Basing House," — "Her Majesty in her Coronation Robes," — and an obsolete portrait of the Duchess of Groby, in a short-waisted gown with cartwheel sleeves, and a butterfly of bows of hair perched on

the top of her head, — there was nothing to be done but to smooth out the rucks in the sofa-cover, and cultivate the fidgets.

She had not courage to ring the bell for a sandwich; lest the need of creature-comforts should be considered unbecoming a person honoured with the confidence of a certain rich man, on whom two surgeons were in attendance; and instead of the glass of sherry almost necessary to support her sinking frame, was forced to content herself with a glass of tepid water, from a decanter of Bohemian glass, stationary in a gilded *papier-maché* stand upon the console, much too ornamental to be replenished more than one day in seven.

By this slight refection (as she would herself have called it), she armed her patience for another quarter of an hour. — But just as she was resuming the devil's tattoo, with her best foot foremost, the door was cautiously opened, and one of the waiters, or it might be one of the medical men, approached her with a message from her pupil.

"Miss Wraysbury's love, and begged she would dine and make herself comfortable; as she could not leave her papa."

With an air as sullenly dignified as might have become Boadicea in chains, Miss Avesford was beginning a remonstrance against the neglect with which she was treated, and the ignorance of her patron's

condition in which she was left, when the messenger, who had probably pressing business elsewhere, interrupted her by stating that Sir John was going on well; but that, as it would be many days before he would be fit for removal, his daughter's baggage and attendants had been sent for. She was to sleep at Northampton.

"Without even consulting me!" was the interjectional reply.

"Miss Wraysbury, Madam, is so completely taken up with attendance on Sir John, that I was forced to take the arrangement on myself."

Boadicea was either pacified, or too hungry to persist in her heroic vein in addressing the waiter.

"Since I am to dine alone, then, Sir," said she, "let no further time be lost. — Bring dinner." —

He disappeared in a moment: and five minutes afterwards, a cover having been hastily laid, the inevitable tarnished silver tureen of opaque oxtail soup was brought in by a head waiter, so far more dignified of aspect than the previous intruder, that she felt as if, in the first instance, due respect had not been paid her.

Her choice was now deferentially requested between pale sherry and brown.

"His lordship had ordered dinner; but had referred them to herself respecting wine."

"His lordship?" — echoed Miss Avesford, a little surprised.

"Lord Dinton, Madam, — the Earl of Dinton — who left you just now," explained the waiter, fearing, from her puzzled looks, that the lady might be dizzy with long fasting.

Dizzy or not, her appetite was already destroyed by consciousness of her want of courtesy. To conceal her embarrassment, she began to cross-question the attendants concerning the mischances of Sir John.

It appeared that, towards the close of the poll, the preceding day, much ill-feeling had disturbed the hustings. — In the struggle, several persons were thrown down, trampled upon, and seriously injured. — A procession, bearing on a shutter the body of a dead child, (which, as was afterwards proved, was not a victim to the scuffle,) paraded the town. At length, when it transpired that a messenger had been despatched by the inspector of the police force to the barracks, requiring the aid of a company of infantry, stones and other missiles began to be thrown: by one of which, Sir John Wraysbury was struck down. For some hours, he had remained insensible; and even yet, consciousness was only partially restored. — Till the results of the concussion had been ascertained, Dr. Gardiner, his privileged torturer, declared that he could not be said to be out of danger.

CHAPTER XXII.

For the four whole days ensuing, Janetta scarcely quitted the dressing-room adjoining her father's sick chamber; though for the greater part of the first two, he remained unconscious of her arrival. — It was, of course, avouched by his surgical attendants, according to the established rule in such cases, that had the blow been struck an eighth of an inch higher or lower, it must have been fatal. — As it was, there was reason to fear that, besides the scalp wound, a deposit had been formed under the contusion, which still threatened perilous consequences.

The result was an immense re-action in favour of the new member. For member he was. While he still lay helpless and as one dead, the result of the poll was declared to be in his favour to an amount which rendered the persistance of the murderous party by which he had been assailed, as absurd as it was factious.

Perhaps they were conscious of their error; for at least as many of them crowded to the door of the hotel to examine the bulletins hourly perceived on its gate-posts, as of his own partizans. A Great Briton is said to be by nature cold and phlegmatic; but once

warmed up, and freely massed with his kind, he blazes like camphine. Had Sir John Wraysbury died of his wound on the night of gaining his election, he would probably have been publicly buried at the cost of the county, and canonized afterwards; though what he had ever done to merit the loud huzzas shouted in his honour, or the post-obit articles already in type for him in the obituary, nay, in the leaders of more than one of the daily papers, it would be hard to say. — A moderately good speech or two at Agricultural Meetings, promising more hereafter, and the amount of his annual income, were the sole authentic traits cited in his panegyric.

But John Bull has long been accustomed to praise himself, as a lover of fair-play; and lapidation is the act of a ruffian, even in a contested election. The cry of "cheap bread" died away in the distance; for the populace had become deeply concerned for the new M.P., when they learned how many doctors were in attendance. But when the news transpired in the town and neighbourhood that his beautiful daughter was also in attendance, — his only daughter, — his heiress-daughter, — captivating the hearts of all who witnessed her filial devotion, the popularity of the suffering man rose to fever-heat. They now admitted that if he died, the verdict over his remains must be "Wilful Murder;" and could he have been elected over again, not a voter but would have given him a plumper. Expresses were

constantly coming in from the Committees of the different towns which had supported him, bearing anxious inquiries; and almost every Abbey, Castle, Hall, Lodge, and Park in the shire had its groom in saddle, to ascertain at least once a-day that the representation of the county was not again vacant.

But all this time Janetta was leading a life of torment. — To her, all these inquiries, all this factitious popularity served but as a stimulant to her fears. — Her father's sufferings, — her father's danger had taken possession of every faculty of her mind.

The only thing real, throughout the whole business, in fact, except the peril of the patient from severe medical attendance, was the deep affliction of his child. — The ties of nature had been drawn stringently closer by the fear of losing him; and when Dr. Gardiner, the leading practitioner in attendance, announced to her that her father was thoroughly out of danger, to his amazement and consternation, she fainted on the spot.

Of all this, Sir John was at present imperfectly aware. He knew not how many nights she had watched; or how many of her meals had been removed untasted. Still he had seen enough of her gentle attendance by his bedside, to love her as he had never loved her before. He had accepted her as she was represented to him by the governess, as a young lady of amiable disposition and tolerable capacity, but sorely

deficient in reasoning powers, and with several courses of ancient and modern history still to go through. But he now saw with his own eyes, that Netta, his child, his darling, was the devoted Maria over again; — Maria, younger, fairer, and more intelligent. — He began to look forward to his recovery, more with the hope of brightening her future life and securing her happiness, than of taking the seat in parliament, which had well nigh cost him so dear.

Already, Miss Avesford discerned that her kingdom was taken from her. The great oracle of Lynchcombe had suddenly become "*Dodone inconsultée*," — and instead of bewildering the mind of her pupil by her logic and learning, she was forced to sit yawning away her lonely day, re-contemplating "John Knox" and "Basing House." But that, fortunately, she discovered on the console beside the dusty decanter, a shabby dog's-eared volume of Mill, (left behind by an American traveller,) and having rushed into its pages, lost her way in them as a guide-disclaiming adventurer of our acquaintance in the catacombs, whence he never emerged, and where he is probably groping to this hour, her brain-pan might perhaps have exploded, like a boiler deprived of its usual supply of water.

But there was a silent spectator of Miss Wraysbury's filial devotion far more watchful and quite as kindly disposed towards her, as the wounded man. Lord Dinton, who, from the moment of the injury till

the new member was declared out of danger, had taken up his abode in the hotel, was deeply struck by the tenderness of feeling evinced by that young girl, in whom he felt a sort of vested interest, as the niece of Bessy Pennington and daughter of poor Maria, and as bearing in her countenance attestation of both relationships; the mild gray eye, so readily softening to tears; — the glossy hair, — the noiseless footstep, — the graceful bend. To look at, she exhibited as fair a specimen as might be of feminine nature; to listen to, the confiding artlessness of a child.

"The sweetest creature I ever saw," was his account of her to her aunt, when he was at length at liberty to ride over to Denny Cross; "good and unpretending as any farmer's lass in the county, and lovely as her poor mother."

"How proud her grandfather would have been of her," murmured Bessy, musing aloud. "From the moment she was born, Netta was a sort of idol to him. — He never cared about either of the boys, perhaps because they resembled their father more than his darling Maria."

"Even over her father," added Lord Dinton, "I have a notion that charming girl will exercise a highly advantageous influence."

Bessy shook her head. The experience of twenty years rendered her incredulous. The reforms which Maria and Sophy had been unable to effect, were

scarcely likely to be accomplished by a girl of eighteen.

Lord Dinton pleaded the sympathy of kindred blood, as stronger than that of even wedlock.

"It may be so, dearest, in *your* case," said Miss Pennington, with a half reproachful smile; "but remember how Sir John disobeyed his father and threw off his sisters, out of love for mine."

"I'm afraid he's a man without very warm sympathies of any kind," rejoined Lord Dinton, frankly, — "an egotist in his way; — not a prating one; — not a man who *talks* about himself, but who thinks of nothing else: — the worst kind of egotist, perhaps, for the prater is voted a bore, and put down by general acclamation."

Bessy did not quite understand him. But she did what renders a pretty woman so much more charming than a wise one, — she smiled acquiescence.

"It is a terrible ordeal for a selfish man to fall suddenly into the enjoyment of enormous wealth," added Lord Dinton; "and I admit that Wraysbury was unequal to the shock. Farmer declares there ought to be a preparatory malady, like vaccination, to prepare a man's constitution for taking the Mammon-fever mildly."

"I am sure *his* nature has not been injured by his riches," said Bessy.

"Because they came upon him progressively, and,

thanks to his own exertions; in gentle spring showers, — not in a water-spout. — All I trust is, that when Netta becomes aware of her position as an heiress, she will not lose her charming artlessness of character. If I did not so utterly detest intermarriages between cousins, I would give much to see her become the wife of our Edgar. — Edgar is a spirited, honest young fellow, who would do justice to her and her millions."

"Sir John would never hear of it," said Bessy. — "His dislike of Mrs. Molyneux amounts almost to vindictiveness. But to talk already of a marriage of any kind for dear little Netta! — A mere child! — She has not yet got rid of her governess!"

"She will, soon, I fancy; though Wraysbury has taken it into his head that a duenna of some kind or other is indispensable for a girl about to be placed at the head of such an establishment."

"And surely he is right?"

"Not when the heart and head are so trustworthy as those of our dear little niece. And then, what right has he to impose such a nuisance upon society, as a pedant in petticoats?"

"Miss Avesford seems to have done great justice to his daughter."

"And in return, he ought to do great justice to *her*. Let him give her an annuity of three hundred a-year for life, and leisure to immortalize herself by compiling a dictionary of Political Economy, — the

subject which just now occupies all the cells of her busy brain, — a penitentiary where she imprisons young ideas in solitary confinement."

Again Bessy Pennington smiled what seemed to be comprehension and approval.

"Such an enfranchisement will be the best thing in the world for her," resumed Lord Dinton. "Even if Wraysbury chose to enthrone her in his own drawing-room, he could not expect people to invite her in return. Half the women of his acquaintance would tremble to open their lips in her presence, for fear of lapses in their geography or subjunctive mood; and he has no right to place a highly respectable woman, who deserves all possible consideration at his hands, in so false a position. — Even Netta, right-thinking and right-feeling as she is, would regard her less if she saw her a mere object of toleration."

"On the contrary," rejoined Bessy, "Netta, who I believe has always feared her too much to be very fond of her, would warm towards her the moment she thought her injured."

It was now Lord Dinton's turn to smile approvingly. "You are right," said he. "Women are the best judges of the feelings of women. — However, I shall allow Wraysbury no peace till he has pensioned off his Minerva. — I want to see free scope of thought and action allowed to my dear niece."

Among many other reasons why Lord Dinton re-

joiced to find that Sir John Wraysbury, on this point, coincided in his views, was his fear of exposing the new disciple of Mill to the quizzing of his nephew. — Edgar Molyneux, though as genial in disposition as a summer morning, seldom resisted his tendency to a joke, no matter at whose expense; and Lord Dinton foresaw that, in the present depressed state of his family circle at the Castle, the young Oxonian would not only resort to Harrals for recreation, but find a butt in the anything but cerulean blue of Professor Avesford.

For already it was settled that, at Harrals, the father and daughter were to pass the winter. The nerves of Sir John were seriously shaken by his severe sufferings; and he naturally clung to the medical attendants whom he believed to have saved his life, and the kind friend who had so gratuitously devoted himself to his sick-bed. — To remove out of reach of advice from Dr. Gardiner or Lord Dinton, was out of the question.

The county, too, — the county which had so flatteringly entered into his wrongs, and lamented his headaches, deserved some token of gratitude. — And very gratifying to him was it to find accordingly, that a sojourn at Harrals, which he regarded as a matter of duty, was the thing in the world most desired by his daughter. — As to Harry, who was about to spend with them the Christmas holidays of his thirteenth

year, provided Jack Frost respected his hunting, or afforded him skating in exchange, he cared very little in what county the winter was to be enjoyed. — Sir John, who had hitherto entertained a sort of grudging apprehension of establishing himself at the family seat, lest his son and heir should already take upon himself, as the future Woolston of Harrals, had little idea how rarely such mercenary calculations enter into the mind of a schoolboy: — the week's pocket-money, — a new pony, — or a gold watch, — generally forming the limit of his covetousness. — It is only grown-up people whose hearts are hard enough to contemplate, without a shudder, inheritings to be derived from the death of a fellow-creature.

Meanwhile, the removal of the convalescent member from Northampton to Harrals, had almost the air of an ovation. — Five weeks had elapsed since the day which so nearly decreed his doom; and the popular favour created by his martyrdom, kept fresh and vivid by liberal ale-spill and expenditure of money, seemed to pursue him to his home; for he was welcomed more like a victor returning to his dominion after the conquest of a new province, than a country baronet having just paid for his seat in parliament by the loss of several stone of flesh, — by an apothecary's bill, the sheets of which would have papered the Town Hall, — and by the disarrangement of his nervous system for the remainder of his days.

Still, it would have been difficult not to enjoy on that bright December day, the sense of release from a sick room, and the company of the happy girl by his side. — Never in her days had Janetta felt so joyous. Her father had expressed himself so kindly on finding her seated by his side, with the horses' heads turned homewards! — The cheers of the people were nothing, compared with those few murmured words of affection.

And then, Miss Avesford was already off to Lynchcombe, to collect her property preparatory to her final resignation of the mace and seals; and about to spend the winter in Edinburgh, with an old fellow-labourer in the fields of tuition, now appropriately married to a learned geologist and interpreter of fossil remains. — After thankfully accepting the proffered emolument, she had hurried her departure, to avoid exposing her disappointment to the scorn of her old enemy, the housekeeper.

"I wish Dinton could have accompanied us to-day," said Sir John, as the carriage turned into the lodge-gates, and the fine sweep of the old park lay before them, — presenting, with its plantations of evergreens, its fine old fir-trees almost rivalling cedars in their droop and verdure, and the stately oaks still retaining their tawny foliage, while here and there, in sheltered situations, a scarlet tinge still clung tena-

ciously to some favoured beech, — a noble winter landscape.

The old place, in short, received them smilingly; and Janetta could not but confirm her father's verdict, that after all, our chilly climate and habits of hybernating in the country, render red brick walls more acceptable to an English eye, than the finest stone façade.

"The grey stone quadrangle at Molyneux Castle looks like a prison, compared with this cheerful place," said he, graciously, as they entered the court-yard, with its stately cedars. "Yes, — I wish Dinton could have been here. But he wished to remain at home, in order to receive your cousin."

"My cousin?" repeated Netta, with a bewildered look; — recurring almost for the first time since her father's illness, to the good service she had received at cousinly hands. And she forthwith began explaining to Sir John that the last time she entered that court-yard, her cousin had met her at the portal.

It was now Sir John Wraysbury's turn to look bewildered.

"You are dreaming, my darling," said he. "At the time of my election, Edgar Molyneux was in Switzerland. — Edgar never was at Harrals in his life."

"I was not thinking of Mr. Molyneux, Papa. Him I have not seen since I was a little girl, and he used

to punish me by corking mustachios on my doll. I was talking of Olave."

"Of young Harpsden? — How, on earth, my dear child, came you acquainted with such a person!"

"By mere accident, Papa."

"I trust so. — His odious father is married again, and we never meet."

All further allusion to the subject was interrupted, just then, by their stopping at the hall-door; where, under the unprecedented circumstances of a return from the grave, the heads of the household had thought it their duty to assemble: — the fat housekeeper, — the presbyterian-looking house-steward, — the portly, well-dressed butler, looking like a thriving Lombard Street banker; besides footmen enough to variegate the sombre dignity of the Upper House.

Sir John accepted the offer of Janetta's arm to enter the house; more for the pleasure of leaning upon it, than from any further necessity for support. — Pausing, for a moment, in the well-proportioned marble hall, rendered warm as an inner chamber by flues and Turkey carpets, he pointed to an organ placed half way up the double ascent of stairs.

"One of the few relics of the old mansion, Netta!" said he. "I retained it because your dear mother played upon it, during her only visit to Harrals. Your mother was fond of the organ, and excelled in Händel."

Such a reminiscence, his daughter was thankful to

him for evoking; for her own thoughts were occupied at that moment with recollections of her ill-starred arrival, and of the dreadful suspense she had endured in the splendid drawing-room they were entering; which looked *now* as if care could not find a place in the spot.

The winter sun was streaming gaily in; and though the side windows were occupied by *jardinières*, containing flowers whose brilliant variety could alone have put to shame those represented on the glowing Sallandrouze carpets, the middle one, the vast turret lantern forming the centre of the frontage, was left clear to command, on all sides, the beautiful home-views of the park. — Close below, lay the balustraded terrace, with its chain of parterres, even at that advanced season, bright with groups of many-coloured chrysanthemums, and the blossoms, white and purple, of the New Zealand veronica. Further on, the waters of the Nene glittered their way across the turf.

Never had Sir John surveyed that pleasant scene, the home allotted by Providence to him and his, with emotions so becoming. — Grateful that his life had been spared, he was doubly grateful that it was given him to enjoy possessions so unexceptionable, in company with an affectionate child. The clear blue skies over-head, with their softening fleece-like clouds, seemed to have acquired a new meaning in his sight.

"Don't you think, Papa, that Mrs. Dysart and

Helmsley will be hurt if you do not address a word to them?" insinuated Miss Wraysbury, little suspecting the stir of feeling which had kept her father silent as he crossed his threshold.

"I am a little overtired by my drive, my dear," said he, creeping from the blaze of daylight towards a snug sofa beside the fireplace; ashamed, how mistakenly, that even Janetta should perceive the moisture gathered in his eyes.

"By and by, then? — You would be pleased with them if you knew half the anxiety they have shown during your illness."

But no opportunity was afforded of resisting her request. After a slight tap at the door, Mrs. Dysart came rustling in, armed with her privilege of office; a salver, namely, containing a cup of well-frothed chocolate, and a warm jelly, for the selection of the invalid. — Her face was broad with smiles; as easily attributed to the convalescence of her beloved master, as to the discomfited exit of her rival, the lady of lexicons.

Sir John, not in the mood for being coddled, satisfied the touchiness of the triumphant housekeeper, by inflicting the chocolate on his daughter. — Then, wishing to be alone, feeling the presence of even Janetta a tax upon his emotions, he bad Mrs. Dysart conduct Miss Wraysbury to her own apartments, which she had not yet seen.

"I should be glad, my dear," said he, as she quitted the room, "to find that you approved of what I have prepared for you."

Strange if she had not! — for never was a prettier suite designed or executed: — the simple white chintz hangings and Axminster carpets, alike sprigged with a green fern-like leaf, without a vestige of gilding or finery; and nothing to be seen but highly varnished maple. — "Quite chaste and unpretending," as Mrs. Dysart musingly observed; — "quite a young lady's apartment."

It did not occur to her, it did not even occur to the "young lady" as remarkable, that though no single room in the vast mansion at Lynchcombe was especially appropriated to her use, or dignified by her name, here, at Harrals, in which she had comparatively so small an interest, a suite had been from the first, even in the architect's plan, specifically assigned her. Still less would Netta Wraysbury have imagined, had the peculiarity been pointed out, that it arose from the jealousy unwittingly cherished by her father; — the question of *meum* and *tuum* ever active in his mercenary mind. There, Lynchcombe prominently represented her interests; and Harrals, those of the future baronet. — And whereas at Harrals, she must always remain a guest, her accommodation had been suitably provided for.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"If you felt well enough to be left alone for a couple of hours, dear Papa," said Netta, (on finding, the following day, that her father was desirous of an interview with his head bailiff concerning some farms for which improvements had been submitted to him previous to the election and its disastrous results,) — "as I know you will not want me during your business with Walkingham, I should be glad to drive over to Denny Cross. I ought to lose no time in waiting upon my grandfather."

"But, my dearest child, he will not so much as recognize you. Dinton tells me, that for the last six months, Mr. Pennington has not even known his daughter."

"But Aunt Bessy will recognize me; and she would be hurt if her father were neglected."

"Better wait till they are both established at Molyneux Castle," replied the invalid, peevishly.

"But *that* will not be for months?"

"I shall use my endeavours to make it weeks. — Bessy Pennington should not be allowed to prolong that excellent man's probation from mere punctilio!"

"Surely the marriage ought not to take place

during a deep family mourning? — Such a disrespect to the memory of the late lord!"

Sir John Wraysbury knew well that it ought not, and would not. But he felt a strong repugnance to the idea of his beautiful daughter introduced into the dingy, threadbare parlour at Denny Cross. With its narrow windows of flawy green-tinted glass, and meagre luncheon-tray, it was no place for the heiress of Lynchcombe.

"At all events," added he, "wait till I am able to bear you company."

"A strong temptation, certainly," said Netta, — placing her hand fondly on his, which, wasted and feeble, lay on the library table. "But we can go again, then, Papa; — *then*, I trust, and often. But to-day, I feel as if the drive would do me good; and it would be such a pleasant surprise to Aunt Bessy!"

Sir John struggled against his disinclination. But it would have been too hard to refuse the first petition of his dutiful daughter. That she might be enabled to return by the time he had wrangled with Walkingham over the number of barns and malthouses to be completed for Farmer Kelly according to the tenor of his new lease, the carriage was instantly ordered; and Janetta, mantled and furred to the teeth, soon found herself in the barouche she had chosen for the drive; whose fast trotting bays required far less than an hour to convey her to Denny Cross.

It was the first time in her life she had ever found herself alone in an open carriage, confronting the refreshing air and falling back upon her own pleasant cogitations; and she decided it to be as agreeable as the postchaise and pair bowling along a good road, which Dr. Johnson declared to be the greatest luxury in life.

If poor in cheering reminiscences, Janetta had now such a happy future to dwell upon! — her father so softened towards her; — her time henceforward her own; — close neighbourship secured with her nearest relations; — Harry about to spend his first holidays in his new home; — and to crown all, the Farmers promising an early spring visit, as soon as the delicate health of their adopted child would allow them to leave Torquay.

And then, in addition to the home circle, such hosts of neighbours had overwhelmed her with gracious messages. — So many friends seemed awaiting her; — so many attractive occupations, in the charming drawing-room prepared by her father's kindness for her use. Her heart was as gay as the song of the robins whistling in the hedgerows as she passed.

At one moment, the pace of the horses slackened, and the footman on the box, touching his hat, looked back with an interrogative air, as if waiting for orders. But no orders were forthcoming.

Miss Wraysbury was in a brown study; if that can

be called brown, which was decidedly *couleur de rose*. The coachman had merely checked his horses, she thought, to avoid running over some hedgers and ditchers, who were working by the road-side, overlooked by a jolly farmer and his son; the former in dirty spatter-dashes, the latter in a rough shooting-jacket; both, in wide-awakes of a highly unbecoming form and colour.

Janetta, however, formed a less circumstantial judgment of their demerits. All she noticed of the group was a very handsome dog, — lurcher, sheep-dog, or deer-hound. — Had the owners been of the Groby Abbey order, she would have guessed the latter; if she had met them at nightfall, — the former. But as they were evidently respectable farmers, the handsome bright-eyed, prick-eared animal was probably the guardian of their fold.

Her reverie was dissipated, ten minutes afterwards, by the opening of the old sun-blistered hall-door of Denny Cross, and being folded in the arms of a lady in deep mourning, whose head Janetta overtopped a little, while fondly held in her embrace.

"Darling Aunt Bessy!" was her sole response to the sobs of the happy woman who had stolen out to meet her in the hall, that her tears, wrung forth by surprise and delight, might fall unnoted; or perhaps, — for in the truest of female hearts prudery will find a

lurking corner, — perhaps to avoid being discovered in the old parlour *tête-à-tête* with her plighted love!

For there on their entrance, sat, or rather stood, Lord Dinton; who advanced towards Janetta with extended arms, as if he too intended to come in for his share of the embracing. He imprinted, in fact, on her fair forehead a grave kiss; which Miss Avesford would probably have termed "an avuncular salute," and which Janetta received with gratitude.

"Good girl, — good dear girl!" said he, cordially. — "I knew it would not be long before we saw you here; though, as I was just telling Bessy, she must not be disappointed if the visit were put off for a day or two. I knew it would not be so easily accomplished as she might suppose."

"Papa was very kind about it," said Janetta, readily understanding to what species of difficulty he referred. And she immediately changed the subject, by answering questions which Miss Pennington had not yet found breath to ask, concerning the progress of Sir John towards recovery.

"He is doing even better than we could have hoped," said she, "and his first visit, when he is able to drive out without fatigue, will be to Denny Cross. — To-day, I have only a very short leave of absence But I so much, — so very much — wanted to see you again!"

On which assurance, poor Bessy had more trouble than ever in moderating her tears.

"How tall you are grown, Netta!" — were the first words she could command. "No scampering on ponies or clambering up cherry-trees, now, darling!" — she added, leaning back from her niece to contemplate the gracefulness of her proportions.

"It is well for you both," rejoined Lord Dinton, smiling, "that Miss Avesford is in Dorsetshire, out of hearing of such crimes and misdemeanours."

But the aunt and niece were already busy with Harry's impending visit to Harrals. "I have not seen him these six years," said Miss Pennington; "not since he was a mere child. — Whom does he resemble?"

"My father's family, I have been told. And I noticed a look of him in my cousin, Olave Harpsden, which confirms the opinion."

"I could not hope that all of you would resemble my poor sister," said Aunt Bessy, with another tearful glance at her niece, at whose entreaty she now quitted the room, to ascertain whether the poor old squire was awake, and able to receive them.

"You did well to come at once, Janetta," said Lord Dinton, when she had quitted the room, and he was left alone with Miss Wraysbury. — "I was afraid there would be some hesitation about breaking the ice between your father and this house. But, once broke

we must not allow the warm current of nature to freeze again."

Janetta contented herself in reply with an affirmative gesture. Her heart was throbbing within her. A strange sound seemed whistling in her ears. She was a little awe-struck at the prospect of approaching the presence of her grandfather: the old man to whom she owed both love and duty, but whose mind and body were deprived of half their vitality. — The idea of the paralytic man appalled her. She had seen such objects only in Scripture pictures, and cuts in the old family Bible. Her spirits sank within her, as, leaning on Aunt Bessy's arm, she ascended the creaking old stairs.

"My father is dozing," whispered Miss Pennington, as they entered the dingy room, from which a venerable attendant disappeared by a side-door. And Netta was instantly struck by the gloomy aspect of the obsolete four-post bed, of dark mahogany, scantily hung with plain green serge, which, as Bessy long afterwards explained to her, had been the resting-place for half a century of the squire, who disliked all changes and innovations; so much so, that a fac-simile of this cumbrous and shabby piece of furniture had been already withdrawn for his use from the lumber-room of Molyneux Castle, lest he should perceive the smallest alteration in his mode of life.

He was asleep as they approached the bedside

that is, his hollow eyes were closed, and his long, silvery hair lay motionless on the pillow. — But though neither his daughter nor his granddaughter uttered a word, nay, scarcely breathed a breath, lest they should disturb him, a sort of inward consciousness seemed to apprize him of their presence. Slowly raising his eyelids, he fixed an inexpressive stare on the young stranger; and, after a moment or two, uttered a sort of incoherent muttering, to interpret which, Bessy bent down her head over his pillow. But already, the quicker ear of his granddaughter had caught the sound: — "Maria — Maria — Maria." — Struck by her likeness to her mother, he fancied that his poor daughter stood before him.

Janetta, deeply moved, almost fancied that she could discern a smile upon the old man's sunken features, as he made this mistaken recognition. But she deceived herself. A portion of the curtain having been drawn aside by his attendant previous to quitting the room, a single dancing sunbeam found its way into the sombre bed, and brightened with seeming intelligence the soul-less face of the paralytic man.

But as if in furtherance of his error, Miss Wraysbury bent her knee beside him, even as his Maria might have done, and stedfastly and dutifully contemplated the wreck of one so reverenced. She felt as if looking upon him for the last time. The sad

of life, already so dim and waning, must soon, *very* soon, be extinguished.

Miss Pennington at length raised her from her position, and gently led her from the room, that she might have time to recover herself and wipe away her tears, ere she prepared for departure. But though a draught of cold water in some measure relieved the oppression of her breath, her countenance still bore traces of the deepest emotion, when she returned to the parlour.

Unfortunately; for strangers were present. — Loud and merry voices assailed her the moment Aunt Bessy opened the door; and but that she was already within it, gladly would she have receded, and escaped. But the two men she had seen on the road, who, to her surprise, were familiarly seated on either side the fire, started up to welcome her; and by the elder one, to her still greater astonishment, she was roughly embraced.

"So, Mistress Netta," said the hearty voice of her uncle Hugh, "because you were riding in a fine carriage, just now, you didn't choose, forsooth, to be seen on the queen's highway, chatting with your farmer uncle? — Come to the light, and let me have a look at you!" — Then, perceiving by her reluctance and her swollen eye-lids that she had scarcely recovered from recent emotion, the good-breeding imparted by a good heart, prompted him to relinquish his hold. Having

placed her in a chair, he began to converse with his sister.

"You should have sent for us, Bessy," said he. "It was a mere chance that made me acquainted with my niece's visit. And it would have vexed me beyond measure to miss her."

"The pleasure was so unexpected, that I own I lost all thought of any thing but those present," replied Miss Pennington, — still flushed and agitated.

"So you often do, now, Aunt Bessy," added the younger intruder, — (who, now his wide-awake was removed, exhibited fine manly features, and one of the pleasantest countenances in the world,) — glancing significantly, as he spoke, towards Lord Dinton, as if joining in the general desire to avert attention from Miss Wraysbury's distress. — "Luckily, the Minister of Public Works at Denny Cross pretended to have business with his drainers; which took us idling and gossiping along the high road; where we were rewarded for our sins as though they were virtues."

By this time, Janetta was sufficiently herself to turn towards him with a smile.

"My cousin Edgar, I am certain!" said she.

"Yes, — your cousin Edgar," he replied, shaking her frankly offered hand. — "I am glad to find you recognize him by the profound nature of his philosophy. — Do you remember, Netta, the last [illegible] spent with you in Carlton Gardens, when we

both urchins, endeavouring to box my ears, because I persisted in calling you Miss W. W.? And how Miss Avesford gave you 'Birds in their little nests agree' to learn, as a punishment for being a vixen?"

"I remember thinking you very rude and disagreeable," said Janetta, blushing at having so undignified an incident re-called to her recollection, though but in the presence of a family party.

"And so I was: — because such a fuss was made about you; and because I was enjoined to treat you with so much consideration. — My governor and mother, knowing that they were not exactly objects of adoration to Sir John, were afraid the offences of their offspring might perpetuate the breach. So Theo. and I were lectured on the eve of every visit to his house, till we hated it like physic. — It was such a consolation to break the playthings, and put up the monkey of Miss W. W.!"

"Not Theodosia. — Theo. was always indulgent and generous," said Netta, reproachfully. "And when we meet again, I am sure she will find something kinder to greet her poor cousin with, than reminiscences of early quarrels."

"And so should I, were not my poor cousin my *rich* cousin," said Edgar, a little startled by her rebuke. — "But let us make friends now, dear Netta, and keep so: — that is, if the constituted authorities

will allow you to be on friendly terms with a scrub like myself."

"Don't believe a word he says, Netta," cried uncle Hugh, patting her somewhat roughly on the back. "His modesty is mere sham. Not a lad in the county thinks half so highly of himself: — for which, however, nobody's to blame but ourselves, who have been spoiling him for the last half-dozen years, till he fancies himself our top-sawyer, — crack shot — and best seat across country. Nay, he sometimes calls himself the best rod and gun in England, Wales, or the Highlands. — Don't you, Edgar?"

"There, or thereabouts," replied young Molyneux, laughing, after having effected another shake-hands of reconciliation with his pretty cousin. "But why don't you add, 'and the best-looking dog in Oxford?' — your usual summing up of my imputed sins and follies!"

"Because in that respect, my dear boy, you are mending," added the jovial Hugh. "You came back from chamois-hunting, t' other day, so confoundedly tanned and ugly, that even *your* self-conceit couldn't stand out against the plain-speaking of your looking-glass."

"If it have survived your chaffing, it might defy any thing!" retorted Edgar, good-humouredly. — "Will you believe it, Miss Wraysbury" —

"Netta, if you please," interrupted his cousin.

"Will you believe, dear Netta, that when you passed us, just now on the road, I was endeavouring to enlighten his country-gentlemanlike mind, by assuring him that his draining pipes were constructed on unscientific principles; whereupon he bade me stick to short pipes and pigtail, — the only pipes I was likely to have heard of at Christchurch. — As if my uncle Dinton had not long made my vacations miserable by cramming me with barn-yard learning, to qualify me for becoming a member of his beloved Agricultural Society."

Struck by the sound of his own name, Lord Dinton, who had been conversing in a low tone with Miss Pennington concerning her niece's interview with her poor old grandfather, now interposed.

"If you allow that chatterbox to get the start of you in conversation, Janetta," said he, "he will never let you get in a word."

"Again, my bad bringing-up!" cried Edgar, laughing. "You are such taciturn people at the Castle, that I am forced to talk for the whole Molyneux family."

He was rattling on; but the antiquated time-piece in the hall, in a voice hoarse and hollow as the striking of a clock in a melodrama, reminded Miss Wraysbury that her time had more than expired. She started up in a moment; and her farewell was cheered by warm *entreaties* that she would soon and often return.

"You have seen nothing to-day of the old place, Netta," said uncle Hugh, as he placed her in the carriage. "When you come again, you must visit the root-house to which I used to carry you on my shoulder, when Woolston and my poor sister were in Germany, and you were the life and delight of Denny Cross."

Little did he dream how often, amidst the cold magnificence of Lynchcombe, and the resonant lectures of the patent governess, his pretty niece had yearned in her reveries after that old root-house, and uncle Hugh, and aunt Sophy, and the unlimited indulgence she had enjoyed in her mother's homely home!

On her arrival at Harrals, she found her father chilly and peevish. Most country gentlemen are so, after a long interview with their bailiff; — who is apt to make their heart bleed with tales of agricultural distress, and their pockets bleed for the means of repairing it. — But though Sir John imputed his poorliness to his first attempt at the transaction of business, it arose entirely from vexation at Janetta's precipitate visit to Denny Cross. Convinced that his connexion with the spot had been the bane of his life, — had circumscribed his sphere, and overclouded his early manhood, — he saw no reason why his daughter should entangle herself so closely in a knot of unsatisfactory relationships. Two uncles struggling in Australia, and a squire never heard of out of his own parish, were drawbacks upon the brilliancy of her

prospects. Molyneux Castle stood high enough to overlook such things. It was different with Harrals.

How much more would he have regretted Janetta's dutiful visit, had he surmised that the cousin Edgar, of whom she spoke so slightingly, nay, in a tone of pique, as a rattling egotist, was one of the handsomest young men in the kingdom; concealing under the exterior of a coxcomb, the most sterling qualities of heart and head! — Else would he not have been so dearly loved, either by Lord Dinton, or the simple-minded Hugh. — Else, he would have been more careful to make the best of himself.

Afraid of wounding her father's feelings by describing the affecting nature of her grandfather's recognition of his grandchild, she merely alluded to Mr. Pennington's condition as hopeless of amendment.

"And having satisfied yourself on that point, my dear," said Sir John, "and that he can derive no possible pleasure from seeing you, I trust you will not always be wanting to drive over to Denny Cross. It would be a great annoyance to me; and I really cannot spare you. — I want you to read to me, — I want you to write for me, — I want you to converse with. — I feel quite giddy to-day, from having only endeavoured to run through the great letters of the 'Times.' Dr. Gardiner says that I must on no account exercise my eyes." —

Janetta's beamed with pleasure at this prospect of occupations which might not have been held particularly attractive by any other girl of her age. But she was so flattered at the idea of being useful; so gratified at the notion of being indispensable to her father! — It did not for a moment occur to her that her life of slavery was about to be renewed; — that even now, while he loved her so dearly, the domestic despot intended to retain the absolute command of her time, — her thoughts, — her projects.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DAY or two after the visit to Denny Cross, the fine open weather continuing, Sir John despatched his daughter, after breakfast, for a survey of the gardens and conservatories; while he enjoyed as much exercise as was allowed him, within doors, by a saunter up and down the sunny gallery of the south front; one of the most rational and pleasantest provisions against the climate borrowed by the new mansion from those of the olden time. —

Finding her absence long, and his steps weary, he paused, at length, to rest, in one of the spacious window-seats; when lo! his eyes encountered a sight that dilated them with horror; — the Heiress of Lynchcombe, if not arm-in-arm, side by side, in the most familiar attitude, with as fine a young man as ever trod gravel or greensward!

They were still at some distance from the house, at the extremity of the grand alley; and as they slowly approached, he saw that they were engaged in earnest argument; that is, the hero was holding forth, — nay, apparently laying down the law; and the heroine, first dissenting by a gesture, and then assenting with a smile. — Never had he been so struck by his daugh-

ter's beauty and grace as at that moment: — because never had he seen her half so animated.

Just as they reached the terrace, he saw the young man, in whom, by this time, he recognized, with deep mortification, his nephew Edgar, — extend his hand towards Janetta, as if in supplication. And lo! after a moment or two of laughing denial, the young lady selected from the bunch of hot-house flowers in her hand, a choicer blossom than the rest, and, apparently in compliance with the solicitation of her companion, bestowed it upon him. Sir John's only solace consisted in the fact, that it was placed ostentatiously in the button-hole of his nephew's coat: not secretly cherished, as if affecting an affair of sentiment.

As they had now entered the house, he made his way back, in no very complacent mood, to the sunny morning room he had quitted in the best of humours, scarcely an hour before; regretting chiefly that he had been so hasty in parting with Miss Avesford, and wondering whether a trust-worthy professional *dame de compagnie* existed out of the chapter of apocryphal animals.

"Papa, my cousin Edgar!" — was his daughter's cheerful announcement of his nephew, whose company she hoped would prove acceptable to the listless man, forbidden to read or exert himself. "I met him at the wicket on my way to the gardens, and have been giving him a glimpse of fairy-land. The conservatory,

though not half the size of the one at Lynchcombe, is twice as full of flowers."

"Grand conservatories are seldom full of flowers," observed Edgar, after receiving a tolerably gracious welcome from Sir John. "They are too lofty, and too uncertain of temperature; designed by architects, not by floriculturists. Ours at Molyneux Castle looks like a Walhalla, and grows nothing but fruit trees. At least I searched it through carefully this morning for a flower to offer to my cousin, and found nothing milder than a palm leaf."

His first word had told against him. "*Ours* at Molyneux Castle!" The *Ego et rex meus* of Wolsey was scarcely more presumptuous! — He, the son of a younger brother, whose elder was on the eve of marriage, to assert proprietorship in the family estate!

"A son worthy of Gerald Molyneux!" was the mental commentary of his uncle. "Well might Janetta pronounce him to be a coxcomb. I must take care that she do not alter her opinion."

He was still more angry when Edgar, seating himself unbidden in his own favourite chair (how are visitors to surmise the favourite seat of host or hostess?) — began to do the honours of his house to him, cross-questioning him in the most affable manner concerning his accident, and offering him the best of medical advice.

"If my uncle Dinton had only thought proper to

write to me," said he, extending his legs as if his boots were perfectly at home, — "I could so easily have been back in time for the election. And if I had been there, I am convinced no disturbance would have occurred. — My uncle is so little known to the populace, and unluckily so shy, — which *they* think proud; and Molyneux Castle has never been popular in the county. The old folks were dignified, silent people; — my aunts never very sociable. — My father was the only favourite with the people, which has rendered me now familiar with them, and something of a favourite with their betters."

Sir John sat aghast.

"Even you, my dear uncle," continued the offender, "are a comparative stranger here. The neighbours have grown up since you married and renounced Harrals; and the county is huffy at your settling in Dorsetshire. An opposition and riot were therefore matters of course. — But I know my way to the vulnerable points of these people, and would have undertaken to make that discontented bear, the public, relax its hug, — rise on its hind legs in your honour, and caper a saraband."

Janetta, on whom the abhorrent looks of her father were not thrown away, kept secretly wondering what Miss Avesford would have thought and said of this flagrant specimen of the rising youth of Britain. Sir John contented himself with replying, as if he had

not been listening to a syllable uttered by his nephew, — "Pray have you heard lately from your mother?" adding, with the earnestness of an invalid beginning to be interested in such topics, — "Pray how are Molyneux and my sister in health?"

"As well as can be expected, under present circumstances," was the young gentleman's grave reply.

"The great age of the late Lord Dinton must, however, have long prepared them for the melancholy event which has recently taken place?"

"But the present Lord Dinton's age did not by any means prepare them for the melancholy event *about* to follow. After figuring for fourteen years, — (two apprenticeships, uncle!) — as heir-presumptive to a peerage, it is far from pleasant to sink into a collateral."

"The change does not appear to have affected your spirits, Edgar?" said Miss Wraysbury, cheerfully.

"Oh! *I* had been living behind the curtain; and was thoroughly up to the trap-doors and stage-tricks. — My excellent uncle never made a secret to *me* of his matrimonial intentions; probably because satisfied that I should discover them, without his assistance."

"Then why not forewarn your parents?" observed Sir John, with a contemptuous smile.

"Because I saw no reason to bring them over to England for the purpose of disturbing the courtship

and marriage of Cock Robin. — Why should not the best man in England become the happiest? — He has been devoting his life to create happiness for other people. His own turn is come at last."

At this observation, Janetta looked almost as much pleased as when bestowing upon him the tea-rose; and her evident approval of his opinions provoked Sir John to remark, "My sister Emma will scarcely thank you. — She was never very partial to Denny Cross. I have to thank *her* for being the first to notify to my father and mother that engagement in the Pennington family which produced an irreparable breach between us."

"And yet, though after twenty years, you still resent her interference, you rebuke *me*, uncle, for not having been guilty of the same wretched sort of tale-bearing!" — said Edgar, shrugging his shoulders.

"Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux will be readily reconciled to their disappointment, when they become acquainted with Aunt Bessy," pleaded Netta, in a deprecating tone. "She is so thoroughly excellent, — so humane — so humble."

"*They* would tell you that such qualities are fitter for the parish-union than for the Countess of Dinton," replied Edgar.

"They constitute a perfect woman, however," persisted Miss Wraysbury, "whether attired in ermine and brocade, or serge and calico."

"Fie, fie, my dearest cousin!" cried Edgar, with

an air of superlative contempt. "Do not make it so clear that you have been grazing on the top of a Dorsetshire down, instead of completing your education in Carlton Gardens. Would you place in the scale such plebeian virtues as self-denial and self-devotion, — vigil in the fetid hospital and activity in the noisy schoolroom, against the high-breeding of the choicer specimens of human nature, — *pâte tendre* instead of potter's clay? — I am ashamed of you!"

A little uncertain whether her cousin's flippancy were genuine or assumed, Janetta could entertain no doubt concerning her father's displeasure. He began to stir the fire, as a safety-valve for his ill-humour; hammering away upon the coals, as though to revenge himself, on something tangible. In hopes that Edgar would show to less disadvantage in discussing subjects more general, Miss Wraysbury accordingly began to question him concerning his travels. Since leaving Oxford, he had been at Lucca with his parents, returning by way of Switzerland and the Tyrol. — "Had he visited Innspruck?" she inquired. "Had he attempted to ascend Mont Blanc?"

"Oh! spare me my tour, my dear coz, if you have any pity on a deserving young man," was his saucy reply. "I have been working away upon it desperately, for the last three days, to my aunts Mary and Jemima; till I have worn every glacier ice-bare, and perjured my precious soul by inventing miraculous escapes. —

The Castle is, as you may suppose, Sir John, just now in but a moderate state of spirits," he continued — turning towards his uncle; "and I, therefore, make it my duty to play Mr. Monkeyman for their amusement, to the utmost of my poor ability."

Sir John, though he contented himself with a slight bow of assent, was evidently of opinion that for the purpose in question, no amount of capacity was wanting.

"In his own family my poor grandfather was sincerely beloved," added Edgar. "He went through life without giving pain or trouble to any human being. When the coffin lid closes upon us, this is perhaps our best chance of being affectionately remembered."

Sir John, a little conscience-bitten, muttered a few words to the effect that the late Lord Dinton had always passed for a very amiable man.

"It is the fashion now-a-days, in these overwise times," rejoined his nephew, "to cry down as yea-nay and useless, men who are merely amiable. But, by Jove, I wish there were more of them! — People may prose away concerning large views — profound intelligence, — and the active development of the public mind; — but I can't help thinking that if every man rendered his own home, household, and dependents as happy, healthful, and hopeful, as lies in his power, the public mind would educate itself. — People who pretend to a more extensive horizon, who boast of the

conversion of half-a-dozen New Zealanders, or the colonisation of the river Bonny, are for the most part men who speculate with the souls and bodies of their fellow-creatures, instead of with guineas or canal-shares. As to political opinions and public measures, one sees them set up and pulled down again, till it becomes plain that those who lived only to promulgate and establish them, sadly wasted their lives.'

"You appear to have formed strong opinions, Edgar, at so early an age," said Sir John Wraysbury, out of patience.

"*Formed* them? Dear uncle, acquit me of taking half so much trouble! — I do but

> Pick them up, as pigeons peas,
> To utter afterwards as God doth please.

As Pope observes in one of his letters, few of the desultory thoughts that pass through one's own mind, deserve the name of opinions."

Sir John, who for many years past had looked upon literature as an impertinent interruption to the business of life, or as a farmer contemplates the poppies that impoverish his corn-field, surveyed the young prateapace with still increasing disgust.

"In fact," resumed Edgar, indifferent to the elevation of his uncle's eye-brows or depression of the corners of his mouth, "the only way I ever manage to form what is called an opinion, is by rattling away as I am doing now, in my visits to Denny Cross; till

Farmer is moved to call me an ass, and bid me hold my tongue. — On which, with pious faith in his superior wisdom, I instinctively adopt a creed contrary to my former professions, and fancy it my opinion."

To create a conductor for the storm gathering only too manifestly on the brow of her father, Janetta began hastily to cross-question her cousin concerning his intimacy with the Farmers and her little sister.

"They spend every Christmas, you know, at Denny Cross," was his ready reply; "and it is one of the most valued privileges of my winter vacation, to be admitted to the society of the Nestor of the bar; a light to lighten the Gentiles, had he not chosen to place himself in eclipse."

"And Aunt Sophy?" —

"My model of feminine perfection!" —

"Aunt Sophy is to Aunt Bessy what the garden-rose is to the hedge-rose; the same sweet flower, in a higher state of cultivation. In both, one worships a concentration of charity, purity., and every Christian virtue."

Janetta's eyes sparkled with delight. — That dear Aunt Sophy, — her childhood's earliest friend! —

"As to little Nonny," resumed Edgar, "I do not trust myself to talk of her; because, with my uncle's consent," (bowing profoundly to Sir John,) "she is some day to become my wife. — Nonny thinks very highly of me. I am her Queen Anne's farthing; the

only person whom she ever saw put Uncle Farmer into a passion."

At this reckless confession, it was difficult to refrain from a smile.

"So I have offered to my little cousin my heart and hand," he continued; "and if Uncle Farmer won't make it worth our while to deliver him from the evil of maintaining us, we are to hire a crossing, or break stones on the road; and live very happy ever afterwards."

He spoke with such glib and fluent assurance, that a stranger might have supposed he was simply narrating matter of fact. But Netta was beginning to see through the humour of Edgar Molyneux. — Condemned to the chartered formality of a dull great house, he had endeavoured to relieve its tedium by the assumption of extravagance and exaggeration, till these figures of speech had become almost habitual. But it happened to be the tone on earth most objectionable to the practical Sir John.

"I hope, Sir," observed the chatterbox, suddenly addressing his uncle in a more respectful tone, "that, as Mr. Farmer has decided to spend this Christmas at Torquay, and there will be no one hereabouts to call me, *à tout propos*, ass, blockhead, and jackanapes, or words to that effect, you will allow me to come to Harrals, now and then, to be snubbed, in order to keep up the charter? — At the Castle, I am a little

spoiled. As the only living thing there under forty years of age, they treat me as still a baby, and load me with sugar-plums, and gilt story books. My dear, good old grandmother, I verily believe, thinks me fitter for a rocking-horse than a hunter!"

"Most children, born within the present century," bitterly retorted Sir John; "fancy themselves fit for hunters before they can run alone."

"Alas! poor children!" rejoined his nephew. "With such a limited choice of baubles to amuse our manhood, we ought to economize them in the outset, — or what is to tickle the fancy of our middle age? — You, for instance, uncle. When in a nankin frock, you used to build little towers, in little bricks of deal, in the nursery of the old Harrals which preceded this new Harrals, (and which, unlike the Phœnix, has been followed by so much finer a bird than its predecessor,) had you attempted mortar instead of bricks, and granite as well as mortar, why, you would by this time have worn down your bump of constructiveness, and become *blasé* with the trowel. — And, under such circumstances, how would you have occupied your time for these dozen years past?"

To have his pursuits thus mapped out before him by a hobbledehoy, was somewhat insulting to the millionary; more especially since, if Edgar's account of his mode of picking up opinions were to be trusted,

he was only rehearsing one of the sapient verdicts of Roger Farmer Q. C. — With an involuntary glance round the finely-proportioned and splendidly furnished room in which they were sitting, small as it was, in proportion to his worldly belongings, he felt too much inflated by the pomp of wealth to submit to be talked down by a landless boy. — Balaam the prophet can scarcely have waxed more indignant at the rebuke of his long-eared monitor.

"I have always heard," said he, with seeming *nonchalance*, "that, with an adequate fortune, this great kingdom was able to afford to any reasonable man, both occupation and pastime."

"A popular fallacy!" rejoined Edgar. "And you forget, my dear uncle, that this great kingdom, as you call it, is not the great kingdom of your youth. — By the aid of steam, the Gods have annihilated both time and space; so that Nat Lee's bombast has become converted into common sense. But they have annihilated, by the same agency, half the pleasures of our forefathers. Fox-hunting, pheasant-shooting, travelling post, are ruined by railroads; and the Anglo-Saxons are humiliated into recognition of the littleness of their 'great kingdom,' by being able to breakfast at Brighton and dine at Edinburgh. — Several projected railways, I have been assured, were abandoned, because, owing to insular limitation, there was much

danger of the express trains precipitating themselves, like the Gadarene swine, into the sea."

Sir John was about to attempt a rounded period or two, about moral grandeur and concomitant colonial extension. But he stopped short. Perhaps he considered his presumptuous nephew unworthy of his eloquence. — Perhaps because he was already bottling it up for his maiden speech.

"I have even heard speculative people assert," added young Molyneux, assuming a graver face, "that it would have been far more advantageous for the descendants of George III., had that obstinate monarch, instead of goading America into rebellion, embraced its interests, cut the English concern, embarked his court and family in an ark built at Blackwall; and established the seat of government on that mighty continent, whose mines were yet unexhausted and whose fields still fertile; — leaving peevish thievish little Britain to subside into a colony. — Who knows? — His Majesty might have created, perhaps, penal establishments in Lincolnshire, and transported his transatlantic felons to Ireland or Wales. Think of the monster nation, into which, by this time, we all have progressed!"

Luckily for Edgar Molyneux, — if a
he expressed himself to retain a
Harrals, — luncheon was at that
— that pleasant meal, without

English country-house would, like the needless Alexandrine or the wounded snake, "drag its slow length along;" tedious as the speeches of more than one M. P., or the visitation sermons of D. D.s without limitation.

CHAPTER XXV.

Sir John Wraysbury had already made such progress in paternal strategy, as to understand the fatal charm of prohibition. — Instead, therefore, of denouncing his nephew as an intolerable puppy, and expressing to Netta an intention of excluding him from his house, he spoke of him, when they were chatting together the following day, as "a rattling young fellow, who would probably grow more steady in time."

"In time to marry dear little Nonny, perhaps?" replied Netta, busily plying her crochet needle. "Eight years' experience of the world should be able to mature even him."

Sir John was not a little edified to find his daughter thus inferentially settle eighteen, — her own present age, — as the exact moment for marrying. — He contented himself, however, with inquiring what was the subject of her argument with her cousin, — apparently a very discordant one, — during their stroll in the garden.

"Discordant, indeed, Papa; — almost a quarrel! Edgar chose to maintain that my cousin Olave is n has never been, and never will be a gentleman. I Harpsden, it seems, after bringing up his son as

gown-boy at Eton and sizar at college, has made an usher of him at some grammar-school, with a view to becoming head-master hereafter."

"A very suitable education and prospect for the son of Mr. Harpsden," said her father, drily.

"Then why do people say, Papa, (which Edgar admits to be the case,) that he has done all this only to annoy and mortify our family?"

"Who told you that they said so?" —

"Lord Dinton, during your illness at Northampton; as a reason why neither Olave nor his father were among the inquirers."

"The less you talk, or hear, or think about these Harpsdens, the better," rejoined Sir John, angrily. "The father insulted me grossly, many years ago; and as my poor sister died shortly afterwards, I have never felt called upon to overlook the offence."

"He has married a second wife, too?"

"Within a year of becoming a widower! — Poor Carry was a confirmed invalid, and ill-calculated for a clergyman's wife. But her memory deserved to be more respected by her husband; who chose for her successor a farmer's daughter of the village, by whom he has something like a dozen children. He consequently cannot afford to do justice to his eldest son."

"He is poor, then?"

"Harpsden had nothing of his own,—Carry about four hundred a year.—The living of Harrals amounts to eight."

"But with twelve hundred a-year, surely it seems unfair to make an usher of poor Olave."

"Many of our Bishops, my dear Netta, have risen to the mitre from such an origin."

"By *very* superior merit, perhaps. — But how many more remain schoolmasters all their lives!"

"And are content to do so. The salary of several of our endowed schools forms a noble provision for persons of the Harpsden class."

"But not for the grandson of Sir Harry Woolston of Harrals, if it entitle his own cousin to say that he is not, and never will be, a gentleman."

"Mr. Edgar Molyneux, (the authority, I fancy, you are quoting,) is capable of saying the same thing of Albert Grandison, or any other young man of his acquaintance who does not happen to have been at Christchurch, or to employ the same tailor as himself."

"You are wrong there, dear Papa. — No one can dress more plainly than Edgar!"

"Because plainness of dress is the foppery in vogue. — But to return, my dear Netta, and for the last time, I trust, to the Harpsdens. It is right I should explain to you that there exists positive enmity between myself and the rector of Harrals. — When he came to this place, as curate, he was much noticed by my father and mother, as a respectable young man of humble extraction, whose activity in the village and

deference towards themselves excused a certain forwardness of manner, the ill-breeding of a low-born man. One of my sisters, whose feeble health rendered her more considerate towards the sufferings of the poor than the rest of the family, and who was thus brought into frequent collision with the plausible curate, saw fit to fall in love with, and marry, him. Her parents, afraid of violently opposing the wishes of one so delicate, contented themselves with expostulating, but in vain. — Poor Carry became Mrs. Harpsden; her husband fancying, that, having thus effected an entrance into the Woolston family, he should profit by Sir Harry's infirmities of mind and body, to acquire unlimited authority in the house."

"Was this previous to your own marriage, Papa?" —

"By a year or two; and Harpsden's influence not only retarded the event, but perpetuated the misunderstanding between myself and my family. The fellow was clearly actuated by interested motives; which, being accidentally frustrated, he had the audacity to expect that, at my father's death, I should reward him for his malice and treachery, by alienating in his favour my rightful substance and the inheritance of my children."

"Was it grandpapa or yourself who presented him with the living of Harrals?"

"My father; — in the conviction that, besides being his son-in-law, he was an excellent parish-priest.

But the rector has proved a far other man than the curate. His second marriage placed him at once on a different footing among his parishioners: — the present Mrs. Harpsden being sister to one of the least reputable of my tenants: — and the connexion involves her husband in all the squabbles, intrigues, and mischiefs of the place."

"But why should there be squabbles, intrigues, and mischiefs in a country-village, like Harrals?"

"When you have seen more of the world, Netta, you will know that, from such petty commotions, no place is exempt. I will not, however, deny that this parish has suffered greatly from the absenteeism of our family, — perhaps I should add, and the consequent predominance of Harpsden. When he accepted the living, he was an orthodox country clergyman, holding, like most of his brethren, that the rubric of our Liturgy enjoins forms wisely suffered to fall into desuetude; because, though the infancy of the Reformed Church could not be suddenly weaned from its wonted food, the lapse of centuries had opened the eyes of the Christian world to their papistical origin. But no sooner did he find his expectation of a legacy from my father disappointed, than he endeavoured to recommend himself, by sudden conversion, to some old Puseyite ladies of large fortune, who reside at the extremity of the parish, at Fornly Lodge; and on visiting our venerable parish church two years ago, I

found, to my amazement, its ancient oaken ceiling illuminated with gaudy colours, like a fashionable conservatory; — an altar tricked out like a stage decoration; — and even the Books of Common Prayer in my family pew (in which we are required to pray for his most gracious Majesty King William), rebound into as close a mimicry of missals, as Mr. Harpsden's moppings and mowings of the genuflexions of a Catholic priest. I confess I was indignant. — I confess that I expressed myself in no measured terms to the new clerk, — a sacristan to look at, — a drone to listen to. Having supplied four hundred pounds, as patron of the living, towards the restoration of the church, I ought to have been consulted before this mummery was attempted. — Yes! — I ought decidedly to have been consulted!"

"Do not agitate yourself, dear Papa. I was wrong to tempt you to talk of all this just now," said Miss Wraysbury, alarmed by his quickened respiration, and the veins swelling on his forehead.

"I am not agitated, Netta; I am simply narrating facts. — Because he had induced those poor deluded old women at Fornly to present to the church a gorgeous painted window, resplendent with saints and martyrs, he felt privileged to introduce all this clerical coxcombry, — all this parsonic dilettante-ism — into the simple church service; — creating a sort of sab-

bath-opera, to bewilder the senses of the farmers' wives and daughters!"

"It is for this reason, then, that we attend divine worship at Hurdiston, instead of in our parish church?" said Netta, — who had hitherto fancied that her father was unwilling to perform his devotions in a pew situated over the grave of her mother.

"Precisely. I choose to worship God in my age as I worshipped Him in my youth, and as He was worshipped by my parents before me, — in all simplicity and truth. — It is the reason, too, why, when the wind is westerly, the bells of Harrals are perpetually dinning in our ears. — We shall come to incense and the confessional, in time, unless I interpose to prevent it. Last year, I memorialized the bishop. But his lordship's remonstrances served to make a martyr of the rector and a monster of myself, in the eyes of half his congregation."

"But if Mr. Harpsden should be acting only according to the dictates of his conscience?" — pleaded Miss Wraysbury.

"He has never, at any period of life, behaved like a man acting upon principle. Expediency is his God; and if England were conquered by the Turks, we should soon see William Harpsden a grand mollah."

"I perfectly understand your resentment against Mr. Harpsden, Papa," — said Janetta, not a little

shocked by the violence of her father's language. "But surely, something might be done for my poor unfortunate cousin?"

"Let me hear no more about him just now!" exclaimed Sir John, rising impatiently, as if to close the conversation. "I have no doubt Edgar Molyneux is for once right, in declaring Olave Harpsden to be anything but a gentleman. — Young men soon find each other out."

Janetta could scarcely resist a smile at the inconsistency of the angry man. But her father had by this time taken up a newly-arrived Quarterly Review. — Better leave him to subside over its pages into a milder state of mind.

Under cover of his book, however, Sir John, like many ostensible readers, was ruminating less over the paradoxes of Tory statistics, than over an act for the better legislation of his daughter's opinions; when lo! the door opened, and without prelude or announcement, in glided his nephew Edgar: booted, spurred, and spattered, in the brightest of pink and whitest of cords; full of spirits, aided by *quantum* more than *suff* of sherry, from his hunting-flask; fresh, in short, from the fastest run of the season. Under such circumstances, what nephew ever stood in awe of even the stateliest of uncles!

"How are you, Sir? — Netta, how are you? I would not let the servants announce me," was his cool

salutation to the father and daughter. "I am come as an envoy extraordinary," he added, on receiving from Sir John a curt and cool welcome. "My well-known genius having decided, from the state of the wind this morning, which way the fox was to run, I offered myself as Pacolet to my grandmother; who mentioned, last night, that she had a note to despatch to Miss Wraysbury. — And here I am, and here it is," — continued he, dropping on one knee to present the missive to Janetta; by whom it was speedily read and communicated to her father, as he sat dumb-struck by his nephew's assurance.

"Lady Dinton is good enough to apologize," she said, "that her deep family affliction prevents her daughters and herself from coming to Harrals — 'to welcome' — she writes, 'the daughter of their dear Lady Wraysbury.'"

"Very kind, — very gracious, — but scarcely necessary," was her father's stiff reply.

"But Lady Dinton adds, Papa, that, connected as we are about to be by a second marriage between the families, there can be no obstacle to receiving us at Molyneux Castle, as soon as the state of your health will allow you to leave home for a day or two."

"Very kind, — very gracious." — And he longed again to add — "but very unnecessary."

"If the dulness of a family circle do not appal

you, my dear uncle," added Edgar, "you would confer a real favour on my grandmother and aunts, by bringing Netta to the Castle."

"At a fitting time," primly replied Sir John, "the acquaintance will arise as a matter of course."

"I *do* believe that the clay of which Midland county people are composed, is ten degrees colder than that of any other district!" cried Edgar, earnestly. "Even to be happy, we are content to wait for a fitting time! My uncle Dinton, for instance. — After a patience unheard of since the days of Jacob and Rachel, he is literally waiting for the month of February, to become the happiest of men, that decorum may not be violated in the colour of a coat! — And now, poor little Netta will perhaps have to spend the winter in no better company than the stone griffins on the terrace; because she must wait for 'a fitting time' to make acquaintance with two old maiden ladies and a dowager, — the worthiest women that ever breathed, — who are dying to know and love her."

No dispassionate spectator would have denied that Edgar, planted in his hunting costume upon the hearth-rug, with his back turned to a fire that rivalled its brilliant colouring, — his cheeks glowing with exercise, and his eyes sparkling with animation, — afforded as handsome a specimen of the Great British sportsman, as ever found his way across country with the Pytchley, or conned his "Nimrod." — Or that Sir John Wrays-

bury, filling his green velvet lounging chair as amply as a Colchester oyster its shell, and in nature nearly as cold and as impassive, presented an admirable study for Doyle, as a personification of the Great British County Member, taking his ease.

But whatever he might look, he was, alas! far from easy. — And though he brought his nephew to a sudden check in his best pace of social philosophy, by carelessly inquiring whether they had "had a good run that morning, and whether they had killed their fox?" he looked, as he felt, as though he would willingly have committed him for twelve months' hard labour.

The young sportsman was fain to confess, that his crack hunter had been blown early in a "tremendous run, caused by a burning scent," and that his second horse had enabled him to reach Harrals. — "But all this must appear mere bosh, to *you*, Netta?" added he, by way of drawing his cousin into the conversation. — "Your Dorsetshire experience of scarlet coats, is probably limited to its Local Militia Captains?"

"I wish Mr. Grandison could hear you," was her laughing reply.

"The Guardsman? — Surely he does not condescend to appear in uniform, out of reach of the Horse Guards?"

"I was speaking of his brother."

"Of Berty? — Do you know Berty? But of

course you do. The best fellow in the world! Such excellent fun as we had together last summer on the Rhine!"

"Mr. Albert Grandison is now, I believe, an *attaché* at Vienna," observed Sir John, whose very questions were made in a tone of dictation.

"Is he? — If his ambassador knows as much, His Excellency must have a tenacious memory: for Berty takes care not to be visible above the horizon more than once in six months."

"Rash conduct, — in one who has his fortune to make by diplomacy!"

"If made, it would not last him long, I'm afraid," said Edgar, laughing. "A gold mill, turned by the Pactolus, would not suffice for Berty. I scarcely know, indeed, what *would* keep his head above water; unless *you*, Netta, would take compassion upon him, and marry him. — And by the way, he is a great admirer of yours; I remember now, his telling me that, when he went down to Blandhurst last winter, in the character of a prodigal son, to eat husks and get his debts paid, he was constantly wandering about the Lynchcombe downs, with his gun on his shoulder, on pretence of shooting sea-fowl: but in reality —"

"Are you not afraid, Mr. Molyneux," interrupted Sir John, suddenly rising and pointing to the windows, darkened, like his own countenance, by a gathering storm, — "of being overtaken by rain before you

can get home? — The glass has fallen considerably since morning."

"And Walkingham informed me just now, like an almanack, that we were to expect much rain about this time," added Janetta, anxiously.

"I'm afraid, then, I must lose no time in asking for your answer to my grandmother's letter?" said Edgar, snatching up his hunting-cap, and preparing for immediate departure, lest he should be still more explicitly dismissed by his uncle.

"My daughter will write to Lady Dinton. I will take care to send over her reply to the Castle," said the county member, having already rung for "Mr. Molyneux's horse," and evincing no intention of resuming his seat, till after Mr. Molyneux's departure; which was at last so precipitately made, that he managed to clear the court-yard before a tremendous burst of rain came down, to render disagreeably apparent to the eyes of the whole household, the monstrous inhospitality of Sir John.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE road winding through the park towards the village of Harrals, so as to amplify half a mile's distance into three times the length, afforded time to poor Edgar to get wet to the skin, before he reached the steep descent into its narrow plashy highway; midway in which, it became necessary to moderate his slapping pace. A brood of unhappy-looking village children were paddling their way, like very dirty little ducks, out of the school-house: where, after the rational lessons of the day were done, they had been undergoing vocal tuition, with the aid of a pitch-pipe; at the hands of a broken-down organist, too old and too deaf for any thing, except to teach little children to psalmodize, out of time and tune.

Having shouted to them, almost furiously, to stand aside, — for Edgar was sadly out of sorts just then with the world and its miry ways, — his ill-humour was aggravated by the sauciness of one of the callow choristers, who pointed to his horse's foot, in token that the animal had cast a shoe; a species of chaff so familiar to the Queen's highway, that Edgar's first impulse was to lay his hunting-whip across the boy's

shoulders, and extract other notes from him than those of the singing-loft.

Another moment afforded disagreeable proof that the warning was honestly given. But the glow of a blacksmith's shop, shining through the rain like a gold fish through its globe of turbid water, made him congratulate himself that the mischief had occurred before he lost sight of the village.

Speedily dismounting, he gave his hasty instructions to the Mulciber, who, but that he plied his bellows in a hunting county, might have been more astonished at the sight of so fine a gentleman and so fine a bit of blood.

Half-an-hour, — for a suitable shoe had to be forged, (the cart-horse custom of the operator supplying none fit for the purpose,) — was the shortest delay promised. — And still, the rain came pelting, pouring down; as it does on a June afternoon in London, when reviews, flower-shows, or *déjeuners* are in prospect. — Between the foul air of the sooty smithy, and the currents of water in the muddy road, Edgar had a sorry choice.

"Can you tell me, Sir, of any inn or public-house in the village, where I could dry my clothes while my horse is being shod?" he inquired, seizing by the arm a man who was hurrying past the pent-house under which he was sheltered, — of whom nothing

was visible but a reeking cotton umbrella and a pair of dirty gaiters.

Compelled to draw up, though in the midst of a puddle, the individual addressed, on removing the umbrella from his face, and perceiving the prepossessing exterior of his interlocutor, answered that "the only house of entertainment, the Woolston Arms, stood at the farther extremity of the village.

"But my house is close at hand, Sir," added he. "Pray come and warm yourself by the fire."

Grateful acquiescence was inevitable; though Edgar, convinced that he had rashly grappled himself to the village doctor, or lawyer, surmised that the Woolston Arms, though their good entertainment for man and horse was probably mythical, would have been far more to his taste. But when, with sheets of rain still dashing in his face, he found himself, a minute or two afterwards, following his leader through a rusty gateway, the demi-pillars of which were surmounted by mossy stone balls — a horrible surmise entered his mind, that the unpleasant-looking brick mansion confronting him, covered by a forlorn vine, from which the yellow leaves were being washed down by the storm into the slimy path under their feet, could be none other than the Rectory!

During the long absence of the Woolston family from Harrals, he had never visited the village; which lay out of the road from Denny Cross to Dinton, "his

daily haunt and ancient neighbourhood." Neither the parson nor the parsonage, therefore, was known to him by sight. But it was no time to pause. The rain was dashing down like a shower-bath; and his gaitered guide, who had hurried on before, stood graciously holding open the house-door.

"Oh! my prophetic soul! — my uncle!"

was his muttered exclamation, as he found himself in a parlour, strongly scented with the vapour of a cindery fire, of birch-broom tea, and children in sloppy pinafores. On a table, still covered with a crummy tea-cloth, two cherubs were pursuing their studies; — one, over a broken slate, — another, over a dog's-eared spelling-book; while in the window-seat, knelt two younger ones, with their noses flattened against the glass, whimpering at the state of the weather.

All four ceased from their murmurs, and crouched down, like threatened whelps in their kennel, on their father's entrance. The room was small and shabby as the parlour at Denny Cross, — "alike, but oh! how different." — Instead of the tidy homeliness of Bessy's sanctum, all was obsolete finery: — glaring paper, covered with coloured prints in tawdy frames; screens and card racks, bedizened with faded ribbons: — evidently the choice of Mrs. Harpsden number two, the notable successor of "poor Carry."

The proprietor of all this nastiness apologized,

however, so civilly to his guest for the disorder of the place, — the natural result, he said, of a rainy afternoon, in a house full of children, — that Edgar felt ashamed of his own reluctance to announce himself; particularly when the Rector put his innocents to flight, and bade them desire their mother would send in coals and dry clothes for the re-edification of the stranger.

He alluded to their "mother," in issuing his orders, precisely as others would have done to the housemaid; and before Edgar had time to make the announcement incumbent on him, in bustled a slatternly-looking middle-aged woman, full of good-humoured exclamations of pity for his plight; and as ready to rub him down as any groom in the Castle stables would have been to rub down his horse. She insisted on his taking off his steaming hunting-coat, and hanging it on a chair before the fire, as familiarly as if they had been friends for years.

She dealt with him, in short, in patriarchal style, as with the stranger within her gates; for there was a great deal of good Samaritanism in the pulpy-looking mother of the unsatisfactory faggot of olive-branches; — twelve of them, — alas! — twelve facsimiles of each other, — distinguished only by the half-head of growth denoting a year's interval.

While the fussy matron was proposing in succession a glass of ginger-wine, a cup of tea, and an ale-posset, — "to secure the gentleman from taking

cold," Edgar blurted out, awkwardly, his self-introduction.

"You do not remember me, Mrs. Harpsden," said he. "My father and mother reside so constantly abroad, that many years have elapsed since we met. My name is Molyneux."

"Edgar? — My nephew Edgar?"

But to *that* epithet young Molyneux could not find it in his heart to respond "Amen." —

Aware how complete had been the estrangement between his parents and the Rectory from the time of Mr. Harpsden's precipitate second marriage, he had half expected, in naming himself, to be bowed out again into the rain. But on the contrary, the brows which at sight of the littered parlour had seemed to undergo spasmodic contraction, now expanded again. — And while the soft-hearted and soft-handed partner of his fire-side indulged in — "Well, to be sure!" — and "well, to think of it!" — with explosive iteration, he shook his nephew-in-law so heartily by the hand, and welcomed him so kindly to his house, that the moist young fox-hunter felt almost dried by his warmth, and thoroughly conscience-stricken.

Mrs. Harpsden, on finding him to be a relation, insisted on his divesting himself of his waistcoat as well as his coat, and proposed exchanging the ale posset previously offered, for white wine whey. — But Edgar, with cordial thanks, assured her that the best

thing he could do was to mount his horse the moment it was ready, and ride home as fast as it would carry him, to the Castle, for a complete change of clothes. — On which, Harpsden, snatching up his umbrella, was off again, through the rain, to the smithy, to accelerate the bellows over which he held canonical sway; — perhaps, because he felt this accidental interview with one of the sons of Belial to be somewhat embarrassing; perhaps because afraid of having to persuade his nephew to "stay dinner." — For dinner was a domestic incident to which he was himself looking back, as his penultimate meal; and though he had adopted the homely hours of his thrifty second wife, he remembered the later hours of days more pompous.

Edgar rejoiced at his departure. — With Mrs. Harpsden, he felt much more at ease. With Mrs. Harpsden, he felt already almost cordial. Such genuine good-nature beamed from her unmeaning blue eyes! — She was so evidently sincere in her regrets that his cousin Olave had not been at home to welcome him! — That distance or unkindness could exist between near kindred, was a thing foreign to her comprehension; and she would have been almost as ready to kneel down and draw off the boots and chafe the freezing feet of the stranger, as, in her tent, the most hospitable of the daughters of Abraham.

On finding herself alone with him, she could not *forbear* talking of her stepson; — his virtues, his

talents, and the pity it was that he and his father did not what she termed "hit it off together." — She did not think Mr. Harpsden rendered *quite* justice to the merits of Olave.

"You see, Mr. Molyneux, Mr. H. is apt to visit on *him* the faults of his kinsfolk: It is no fault of Olave's that Sir John Woolston (no offence, I hope?) is a curmudgeon; for the young man himself is as open-handed as he is open-hearted. Such a brother as he has been to my children, — teaching them, Sir, like a school-master, and loving and playing with them like one of their playmates. When I came into this house, Mr. Molyneux, (and a proud day it was for me, Sir,) Olave was but a child; and I petted him as such, and soon loved him so dearly, that when little ones of my own made their appearance, I scarce felt a difference betwixt 'em."

Edgar saw, by this time, that the woman, who went prattling on thus artlessly, was a being without guile or bitterness; one of those exceptional natures that fling off the corruptions of life as the feathers of the swan the rain. Whatever the meanness of the Rector, it had not communicated itself to his wife. — It was easy, therefore, to forgive her blowsy curls and ill-adjusted hooks-and-eyes, and to overlook the dirty table-cloth and littered hearth. — Nay, he almost forgave the want of pocket-handkerchiefs and pocket-combs exhibited by the innocents.

Her husband, meanwhile, probably conjectured the drift of her conversation with the son of his sister-in-law. For in a far shorter time than could have been anticipated, he was seen hurrying past the parlour window, marshalling the well-shod "second horse." And as the rain, like all sudden showers, had ceased as abruptly as it began, and the sky was now clear, Edgar hastened to take leave of his kind and over-communicative hostess, settle with the blacksmith's boy, shake hands with "uncle Harpsden," and gallop off towards home.

But it was with his ears down-hanging, and his reflections down-hearted. He felt painfully convicted of gross injustice towards Olave. As to the Harpsdens themselves, how differently had been their treatment of him, — *him*, their enemy, from that of the churlish, grudging, inhospitable Crœsus of Harrals!

Of Aunt Carry's successor, though he thought with the utmost indulgence, he did her scant justice even now. Had he known how often, at the risk of drawing down upon herself the thunder-bolts of Jupiter Harpsden, she had succoured and comforted the miserable lot of her stepson, he would, at parting, have kissed her hand. — So far from treating with disrespect the memory of her predecessor, as Sir John had described, — her deference was carried to excess. In a drawer of her wardrobe, was carefully set aside as sacred to the deceased, and belonging to her son,

secure from air and daylight, a collection of the trinkets, laces, and treasures of poor Carry, which she preserved in all the odour of sanctity and lavender, for the future bride of Olave.

In these sentiments, however, she had never been encouraged by her husband. Harpsden, at heart as mercenary as the rich baronet, had married Farmer Bothamley's full-blown sister with the intention of making her not only a nurse for his motherless boy, but an active substitute for the sickly dawdle whose fortune had proved so inferior to his expectations. — Long accustomed to admire the hospitable cheer and well-kept household over which Sarah Bothamley presided, he expected the Rectory to assume the same sunny aspect.

But he had not calculated that a quick succession of offspring would invalidate her industry, and mar the order of his house: — still less, that the habits suitable to Ash Bank were ill-assorted to his professional dignity. — Theatrical managers, in the days when theatres had companies, were careful to engage the stars of the provinces to fill fourth or fifth rate parts on the London boards; and even the great Edmund Kean, though the Shylock of Exeter, was to be a supernumerary at Drury Lane. — But on discovering that he had over-rated the genius of Farmer Bothamley's sister, and placed her in a class above her degree, Harpsden remorselessly degraded her into

a household slave. Fortunately, her excellent disposition was her safeguard. If she perceived, she certainly did not resent his unkindness.

Though little of all this was at present apparent to Edgar, he did not hesitate, while spurring his horse homewards lest he should be too late for the dowager's dinner-hour, to place Mrs. Harpsden, *née* Bothamley, in spite of her untidy gown and hair, in the category of ornaments to her sex.

He judged it unnecessary, however, to enlarge at the Castle on the merits or demerits of the Harpsdens; being unwilling to draw attention to the frequency of his visits to Harrals. — On the present occasion, moreover, his morning's occupations naturally escaped discussion. — The late post generally brought his foreign letters; and among them, was one from his mother, containing family news of more than ordinary interest.

After a detailed programme of their prospects for the winter, — English families of note arriving and arrived, — and diplomatic changes of far more moment to the dinners and balls of the Eternal City than to the political interests of Europe, — Mrs. Molyneux added, — *à propos* to her severe mourning for the late earl, "which would be a sad tax on the pretty *toilettes* of poor Theo.," — "It is lucky, by the way, that, under cover of this *corvée*, my black gown in honour

of poor Clara's husband, will pass unobserved. I am afraid Wroughton was a dreadful person. — He died suddenly, at Frankfort, last month, under circumstances so suspicious, and leaving his affairs in such disorder, that his papers and effects were sealed up by the police. — Saint Marcel, the French *chargé-d'affaires* wrote word of all this, confidentially, to Gerald; and I dispatched, of course, a few lines of condolence to poor Clara: though, had I dared, I should have made them congratulations. — Her answer, which has just reached me, contains no allusion to the circumstances attending her husband's death; but she says that Hilda and herself are left miserably off; — with something about four hundred a-year, — the interest of her fortune, secured to her by settlement. On this, however, she says, they can live decently in Germany; and, Frankfort being out of the question, (she refers, of course, to Wroughton's misdoings and discredit,) they are about to make some small town in Würtemberg their future home."

"But Sir John Wraysbury will now make a proper allowance to his sister," argued Lady Jemima, when, in the course of the evening, her nephew disclosed the contents of his letter. — "He *must*. — For his own credit sake he *must!*"

"I have heard Emma mention that Mr. Wroughton was especially obnoxious to him," — observed Lady Mary.

"But what then? — Mr. Wroughton is dead; and his widow an object of the utmost compassion — Do you remember your Aunt Clara, Edgar?" —

"Perfectly. — I recollect her at my grandfather's funeral, with the saddest face I ever beheld: a model for a Mater Dolorosa."

"And *I*, also, remember her a model for a Hebe!" added Lord Dinton. "She accompanied my brother and his wife to the continent, a gay young girl; made Wroughton's acquaintance, under their auspices, — married him, and never smiled again."

"Some years ago," added Edgar, "we met the Wroughtons at the baths of Aix, in Savoy. But they seemed annoyed at our arrival, and soon disappeared. Their daughter was, even then, beautiful." —

"The Hilda of whom Emma speaks as about to share her mother's scanty pittance," remarked Lady Jemima. "Poor child! — What a prospect for them both!" —

Edgar made no reply; he was, perhaps, deliberating whether Sir John had been apprized of Mr. Wroughton's decease, and chose to take no notice of it? Or whether poor Mrs. Wroughton, so long and obstinately repulsed by her rich brother, had secured herself by silence, against further ungraciousness?

In the latter case, it might perhaps serve the cause *of the* widow and orphan if he placed their wealthy

relative in possession of the facts of the case, by communicating the contents of his dispatch from Rome.

Edgar, Edgar! — Was this seeming magnanimity only a pretext for another visit to Harrals?

END OF VOL. I.

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